

Young Klondike

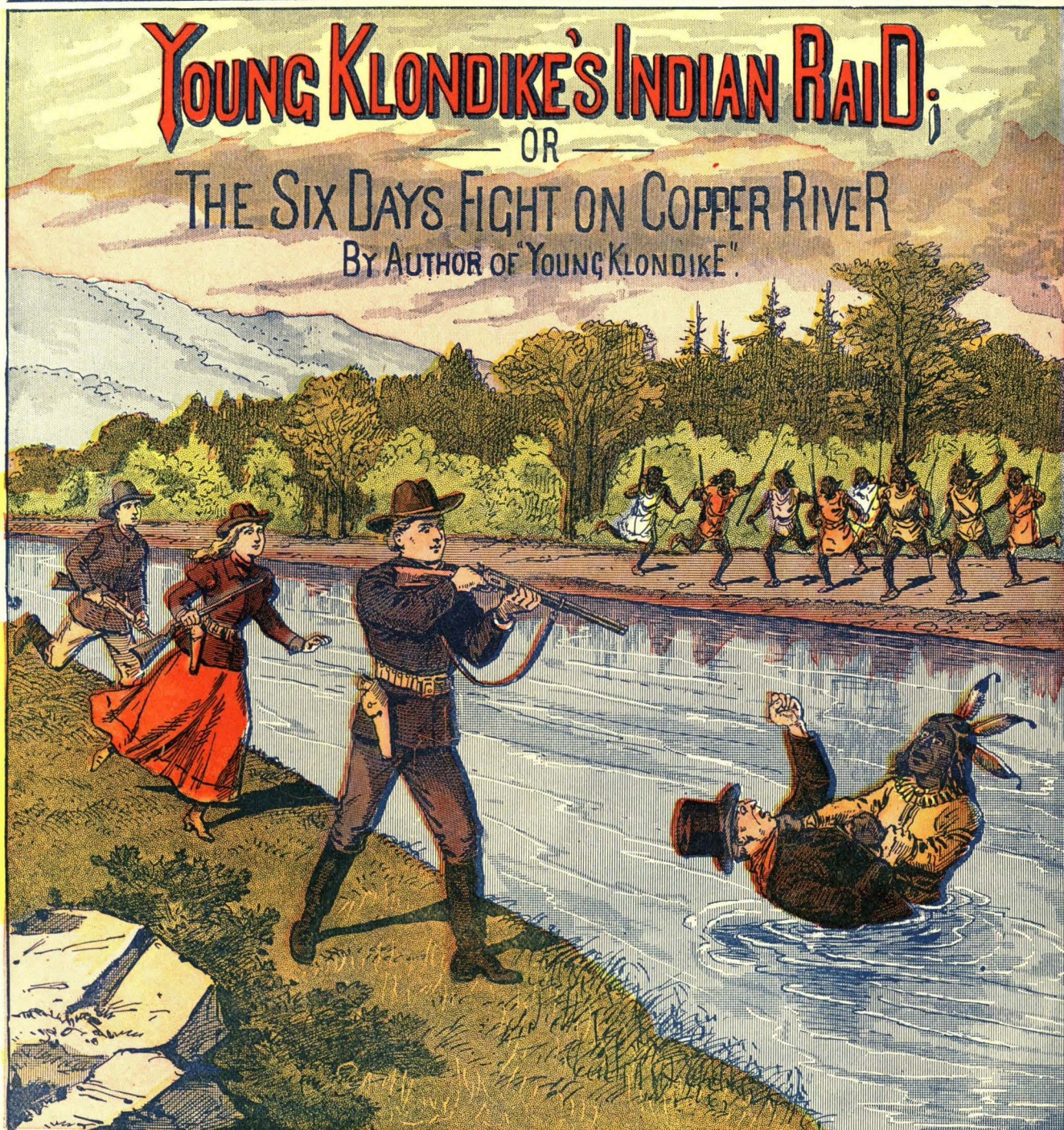
STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

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"Help! Help!" shouted the Unknown. "Shoot him, Young Klondike! Shoot him, or I'm a goner!"
"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted the Indian. "No shoot, white boy! See, Black Rabbit
no got gun; paleface show Indian which is de best man."

YOUNG KLONDIKE.

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YOUNG KLONDIKE'S INDIAN RAID; OR, THE SIX DAYS' FIGHT ON COPPER RIVER.

BY AUTHOR OF YOUNG KLONDIKE.

CHAPTER I.

A MESSAGE FROM A DYING MAN.

"That's Ned."

With this cry, Dick Luckey, Ned Golden's partner, jumped from his seat and opened the door towards which he had for some time been gazing anxiously.

"No one there," said Dick, looking down the passage. "Yet I thought I heard a step."

"Must have been your fancy, Dick," remarked Edith Welton.

"Ned ought to have taken my advice," said the Unknown. "I told him not to go, but he wouldn't listen. He's been gone several hours now, and I don't like the look of things."

"You think that letter he received was a decoy, Zed?" inquired Dick.

"Likely enough. Maybe some tough gang has got hold of him, and if he escapes with his life it may cost a pile of money."

"Let us go and look for him, Zed," said Edith. "Every moment may be important. I'm just as worried as I can be."

"We don't know where to look. Hello!" cried the Unknown, springing up. "That's a voice I seem to know. By the Jumping Jeremiah, Ned at last."

The door opened and a handsome young man entered. This was Ned Golden, otherwise known as Young Klondike, whose fame as a successful miner was spread far and wide.

The three who had been anxiously waiting for him greeted him warmly, and having closed the door Ned sat down.

The four friends were in a room belonging to a hotel at Tanana, a town on the upper part of Caribou creek, near the Gulf of Alaska, to which place they

had come to get stores before starting for Copper river.

Almost as soon as they had arrived at Tanana, Ned received a letter asking him to call at a certain house in the town, and he had just been there in answer to the message.

As we have stated Dick Luckey was Ned's partner, the firm being known as Golden & Luckey.

Edith Welton was also a partner. She had made the acquaintance of Ned and Dick under eventful circumstances. She had started for Juneau, expecting to meet her father on the Klondike, but the steamer in which she took passage was wrecked on the way up the coast.

Ned and Dick were New York boys on their way from Seattle to the Klondike at the time. They saved Edith from the wreck, and she accompanied them to Dawson City, finding on her arrival there that her father had gone to South Africa.

Friendless and alone Edith had joined her fortune to Ned and Dick, and the three young people and the Unknown had been together ever since.

The Unknown called himself a detective. He had certain peculiar characteristics which will develop themselves in the course of this story. It is sufficient here to briefly describe his appearance, for this was entirely out of the usual line.

He was short, wore a shabby plug hat, and a pair of big cavalry boots.

"Have you got it?" cried Dick, breaking the silence.

"I have heard something," answered Ned.

"What you expected to hear?" inquired Dick.

"How could I expect to hear anything, seeing that the letter I received gave me no clew to what was wanted of me. Still, I'm very glad I went."

"What did you hear, anyhow?" asked Edith.

"Where've you been?" asked the Unknown.

"Don't all speak at once," said Ned, laughing. "If you'll keep silent I'll tell you what's happened. The message I received was from a woman, and her messenger took me to her. She had a letter for me, which had been brought to her with the request that she should put it into the hands of Young Klondike."

"Who is this woman?" asked the Unknown.

"That's a matter of no consequence. She doesn't come into the story, Zed. With the handing over the letter her part in it is finished."

"And you have the letter?" asked Dick.

"Here it is," replied Ned, holding it up.

"Read it! Read it!" cried the Unknown.

"That's what I am going to do. Here goes:

"MISTER:—I'll be mighty glad to see you, for I've something to tell you that's worth hearing. You'd better put everything else aside and come to me at once. Don't delay, for I'm a very sick man and won't be alive many days."

"The letter," added Young Klondike, "is signed 'Chris Peters.'"

"The name doesn't convey much. Never heard of him before," exclaimed Dick.

"That shows your memory isn't good, Dick," answered Ned. "Chris Peters worked for us at the Young Klondike mine on El Dorado creek."

"A square man!" cried the Unknown. "I recollect him well."

"Wonder what he has to say?" mused Edith.

"Maybe to put you on your guard of some plot to kill you," said Dick.

"Or to get your money," suggested the Unknown.

"The quickest way to find out is to go and see the man," said Ned.

"You intend to go?" asked the Unknown.

"Sure, and at once, too. The man's evidently dying. He has a secret he wishes to confide to me, and I should be very foolish to neglect him. We start at once."

"We shall be buried in the snow if we have to go far," cried Dick. "Where does he live?"

"Down on Valdes Bay, at the mouth of the creek. I know a storm's pretty well due, but if we hustle, we may get to the man's hut before it breaks."

No time was lost now. As it was an imperative duty to see Chris Peters, the sooner the journey was made the better.

It was the beginning of winter. Snow covered the ground, but the rivers were not yet frozen. The wind, however, was piercing, and before many miles from Tanana had been traveled, Ned and his three companions were almost frozen, and the dogs which drew their sled began to show that they also felt the cold.

The snow began to fall now, and very soon a blizzard was experienced, so that it was almost impossible to make any headway.

"If Chris Peters is dying, he'll go without seeing

us," remarked the Unknown; "this gets worse and worse."

"And for why?" asked Dick.

"Because, dear boy, yours truly and party are going to pass the night where they are. We'll be lucky if we strike Valdes Bay at all."

"I think the Unknown's right," said Ned. "It's madness to continue any further; besides, we have a chance of making a shelter now, for I see a lot of hemlocks growing on the bluff. If we pass them we may not strike any more."

"Then let's get to work at once," cried Dick. "I'm half frozen already."

A halt was made and they cut down a large quantity of hemlock branches, and putting some up-rights in the snow and laying the branches across them, they soon formed a tolerable shelter. It was not warm, but at least it protected them from the snow and wind, and that was something, and they had their mission blankets to do the rest.

It was quite dark now, but this does not mean that it was night, for it was only the early part of the afternoon.

There is not much light during a Klondike winter.

They sat in their shelter with their lanterns lit trying to keep warm, and watching the weather very closely. Towards six o'clock the storm began to moderate, and a little later the dogs were harnessed up again and the journey was resumed.

"I'm glad to be on the move again," cried Dick. "It's warmer work than sitting still."

"Can't say I agree with you," said the Unknown. "The wind strikes pretty cool round my ears."

"Your own fault, Zed, for wearing that ridiculous hat," laughed Ned. "You have to pay for your eccentricities."

"Say, dear boy, have you any idea where our friend Chris lives?"

"On Valdes Bay," answered Ned, "near Caribou creek."

"Strikes me as rather vague, that direction," replied the Unknown. "Valdes Bay is somewhat extensive and it's not easy to find a house in the dark."

"Probably it's the only hut there," said Ned. "Keep your eyes open, for we may see a light at any moment."

"Keep your ears open!" cried the Unknown. "That's more to the point. I declare I heard voices, and Indians at that, unless I greatly mistake."

"Pshaw! The wind buzzing in your ears, Zed."

"There's not a sound," cried Dick. "The Unknown must have been dreaming."

"Very well; I was dreaming," said the Unknown, in an offended tone. "I heard nothing. I'm no good. I'm a back number."

"Oh, stop that," cried Ned. "Don't work that old racket again. Try something new."

After walking about a quarter of a mile, the Unknown broke the silence.

"It is just possible," he said, "that I may have

been mistaken, for I haven't heard a sound since I spoke. Not a word."

"There's a light!" cried Dick, suddenly.

"It's a lamp burning in a hut!" exclaimed Edith.

"That must be Chris Peters' hut," said Ned.

"Anyway, we'll stop there and if it's not the place, we'll get some information that will help us to find the place we're after."

The hut they were approaching was on a bluff which rose abruptly from the somewhat level ground that bordered Caribou creek. It was quite impossible to reach the shanty on any side of it without driving the dogs up a steep ascent.

As Ned urged the dogs on they heard some one speaking. No doubt the lantern they carried had attracted attention.

"That you, Young Klondike?" cried a voice.

"Yes, who are you?"

"Chris Peters."

"We shall be with you in a minute," answered Ned.

"I'm glad he's not so sick as we thought," he added, in a low tone. "He can't be, or he wouldn't be standing at the open door."

When they reached the hut Chris Peters was lying on his bed again. Apparently, the exertion of going to the door had exhausted him, for he lay motionless, breathing with difficulty, and having a face as pale as that of a corpse.

Too weak to speak, he motioned the party to close the door and to come near him.

They drew around the bed, finding seats on boxes.

The Unknown produced a flask and poured a few drops from it down the sick man's throat, and the liquid seemed to revive him, for he began to talk.

"Glad to see you, boss," he said, addressing himself to Ned. "Guess you don't know me. I'm altered some, they tell me."

"You've changed, certainly," said Ned, "but I knew you in a minute."

"You'll soon get well, Peters," Edith remarked, "with the care we shall give you."

"It's too late, miss. I'm going to pass in my checks this time, for sure," was the reply. "I got this coming across Valdes glacier. Two nights on the ice with nothing to eat and no warm clothes. So the fever struck me, and boys, I'm pretty well gone."

"But you ought not to be alone, Peters," said Ned.

"My pard's been looking after me, but he had to go to Tanana with that letter for you, Young Klondike, and speaking of that letter, brings me to business. It's not much time I've got left, and so the sooner I begin to talk the better."

"Don't hurry. Rest yourself, Peters. You'll find yourself stronger soon," Ned replied, kindly.

"No, no, boss, I know how I am. See here, I'll fire right away, and I want you to listen to every word, for it's worth your while, I can tell you. My voice is just a bit shaky, Young Klondike, but that can't be helped."

"I can hear every word you say, distinctly," answered Ned. "Go on."

"Now, boss, to get right down to bed rock at once. I have a secret, and a mighty big one, too."

"Does your partner know it?"

"He knows nothing, Young Klondike. He's all right in a way, but he's not quite the cuss to tell a thing of this sort to. I dunno but what I might have spoken to him if you hadn't come, though. This secret of mine is worth money, boss, maybe millions, there's no telling. Lift me up a bit, I'll breathe better."

Edith and Dick raised the sick man, and the Unknown gave him a few more drops from the flask.

"Now, I'm off. Up in the Copper river district I was prospecting a month ago, and I made a find near Cedar Gulch. Do you know it, boss?"

"I've never been there," said Ned, "but it's about thirty miles beyond Copper Centre, isn't it?"

"That's the spot. You keep to the river," continued Peters, "and you can't miss the place, for you'll see a great belt of cedars there, and it's the first you'll strike after leaving Copper Centre. Say, there was gold at El Dorado creek, wasn't there, boss?"

"It was my richest strike."

The man looked earnestly at Ned.

"Young Klondike," he said, slowly, "you'll find a bag under my head. That's it. Now empty it on that chest."

Ned did as he was told, and he was astonished at what he saw, for nothing but nuggets of gold of various sizes rolled out of the bag, at least a thousand dollars' worth.

"What do you think of it, Young Klondike?" asked Peters. "My strike at Cedar Gulch, boys, and just one panful at that."

"I can hardly believe it!" cried Ned.

"It's as true as gospel, mister. I swear it," said Peters, impressively.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" exclaimed the Unknown. "Think of that gold, Peters, and get better, so as to start with us for Cedar Gulch."

CHAPTER II.

THE INDIANS ATTACK PETERS' HUT.

THE Unknown's effort to rally Peters was not successful.

The man shook his head.

"No, no!" he said; "I'll never dig another pick into the ground. My mining days are pretty well over. Now, Young Klondike, I make you a present of this gold on one condition, and I know 'fore I speak that you'll keep it, for you're the whitest man I ever struck."

"Tell me what it is, Peters, and rely upon me," answered Ned.

"I've a wife, poor woman, and three little ones," said the man, in a broken voice. "They live down in Kansas City, and it's a hard time they'll have when I'm gone. Mister, you won't let them starve, will

you? You'll give them some of the gold at Cedar Gulch?"

"Peters, I give you my word," said Ned, solemnly, "that your wife and children shall have your share of the gold, whatever it may be. There's my hand on it."

"Thank you, boss, thank you! I'm easy now, for I know you never go back on your word, and by gosh! my wife and children are all right, for the gold's there and you'll get it."

"I will do my best to find the place," said Ned.

"You'll have no trouble. It's between the trees and the river."

At this moment there was a wild yell outside the hut.

The Unknown sprang up as if he had been shot.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" he shouted; "there's no mistaking that sound. Ye gods and little fishes! Indians, as I live!"

Peters clutched Young Klondike's arm.

"I know them!" he gasped. "Indians from the Copper river, boss, it's all up with me this time. Those men have struck my trail right enough."

"Your trail?"

"Yes, Young Klondike, it's me they're after and they've run me down."

Here the Indians gave another wild yell.

"I'll sell my share of the Cedar Gulch gold cheap," said the Unknown. "We're in a tight corner, Ned, and I don't know what's going to happen."

"It's Copper Bill's doing," said Peters.

"Who's he?"

"A half-breed, boss. He's the leader of the gang, and a pretty bad lot, too. Me and him had a row, and he was after my scalp, that's why I left the gold at Cedar Gulch and came down here. Meant to go to Tanana and get some men to go back with me. Well, Copper Bill's after me, Young Klondike. He won't lay a finger on you or any of your friends."

"I don't intend to give him the chance."

"I'm a dying man, mister. A few hours more or less don't much matter. You skip, Young Klondike, and let me do the best I can. There ain't no good your running into trouble on my account."

"That kind of talk won't do," answered Ned. "We'll stand by you to the last, Peters."

"You bet we will!" cried Dick.

"Hello! someone's talking," said the Unknown.

"Peters! Chris Peters!" called a jeering voice outside, "we want you, Chris! We're going to skin you alive!"

"That's Copper Bill," groaned Peters, with a shudder.

A wild yell from the Indians followed their leader's words.

"Shall we answer them, Ned?" asked Dick.

"Not in words," said Young Klondike.

"What do you intend to do?"

"Wait, Dick. You'll very soon see."

As no reply was made, Copper Bill and his followers became very impatient, and they advanced up the

bluff nearer the hut. They were now probably about thirty or forty yards away, shouting wildly, and apparently indulging in a kind of war dance.

"Is it any good trying to make terms with them?" said the Unknown.

"There's only one thing you can do, mister," answered Peters. "Give me up and they'll go."

As this was out of the question the subject dropped.

"It's about time to carry out my plan," said Ned.

"Oh, you have a plan, have you?" asked Edith.

"I should think so. Hide that light, Dick," Ned went on, "so that it can't be seen from outside. I don't want them to be able to locate the hut."

"What are you going to do?" asked Dick.

"Don't be impatient; wait."

Dick put the lamp behind a box, which completely shaded it.

"Now, I think all is ready," said Ned. "All your rifles loaded?"

"You bet they are," cried Dick.

"Good enough! Wait a minute now."

Ned went to the door, which he opened so quietly, that not a sound could be heard. The lamp being hidden, the hut and those inside it were completely protected by the darkness from observation.

"Chris! Chris! Chris Peters!" cried Copper Bill.

"We want you, Chris! Come out!"

"Let them have it!" shouted Ned.

Instantly a volley rang out from four rifles, for Ned, Dick, Edith and the Unknown, standing at the open doorway, fired together.

"Give them another!" cried Dick, and once more four bullets went amongst the astonished Indians.

Cries of agony and rage were instantly heard, and just as the door of the hut was closed violently, Copper Bill's men returned the fire. The bullets rattled against the log hut, but none of them did any damage.

"Guess your friend Copper Bill's shaken up a bit," said Ned, laughing. "Not the kind of reception he expected, Peters, is it?"

"He's not gone yet," said Peters, gloomily. "He's hard to beat, and you have your work cut out, boss; now he's against you."

"A little thing like that doesn't trouble us," said the Unknown. "Certainly it don't scare me for a cent. Say, Ned, it reminds me of that night when I was attacked by twenty brigands on the Balkan Mountains in Turkey, twenty men, boys, all at me at once, and I——"

"We know," laughed Dick. "You just looked at them and hypnotized the lot. Try it now, Zed."

"You mistake me, dear boy," said the Unknown. "That was not how I acted."

"Shut up!" cried Ned. "You're making such a row that I can't hear what's happening outside, and it's important to know. Those men may crawl up to the hut and rush the door before we know it."

"Right you are, Ned," answered the Unknown. "I'll tell you the rest of the story some other day."

"Hello! Hello!"

"Copper Bill's voice!" cried Peters.

"He's speaking to us, Peters," said Ned.

"Don't open the door, Young Klondike," exclaimed Peters. "He's crooked and you can't trust him."

"I'll shout through the door," said Ned. "Guess he'll hear me. Hello! Who is it speaking out there?"

"Copper Bill."

"What do you want; say on?"

"Mister, you've riled my men pretty much," said the half-breed. "Them bullets of yours has wounded two of them, and there's not much breath left in three more."

"Hurrah!" cried Dick.

"Keep quiet!" exclaimed Ned. "Let's hear what the man has to say."

"Still," continued Copper Bill, "it's not against you, whoever you are, we're fighting. Take your traps and go. I promise you my men won't raise a finger against you." The half-breed spoke to the Indians in their own language, evidently explaining to them what he had been telling Young Klondike.

"Huh! Huh!" they cried.

"You hear them?" asked the half-breed. "They're willing to let you go. It's Peters they want. You can come out and walk right through the whole crowd of us, and no one will draw his gun."

"I shan't give them the chance," cried Young Klondike. "We're not going to leave this hut."

"This is the last offer I make. Refuse it," shouted the half-breed, savagely, "and I won't protect you any longer. I hand you over to my men to do with you as they please."

"I want none of your protection!" cried Ned. "I can take care of myself, and my friends can do the same. You're a gang of murdering scoundrels. If you want Peters you will only get him by killing us, for we'll fight for him to the end."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "That's the way to talk, Ned."

There was a wild yell from the Indians when they understood what was said, and then everything was still. No doubt Copper Bill was taking counsel with his followers as to what his next move should be.

Ned and his friends were on the alert, resolved to resist to the last.

"Could you see anything of the enemy when the door was open?" Ned asked the Unknown.

"I did. I should think there were at least twenty of them, so if we've settled five as that fellow says, we have about fifteen against us now."

"Fifteen demons!" said Peters. "As well have fifteen tigers against you."

"But we have the hut!" cried Dick. "We can hold it easily. The door seems strong."

"That's right enough, Dick," said the Unknown. "Unfortunately we have only this door to fire through. On the three other sides there's no outlook of any kind, so that the enemy can get as near as they please without our seeing them."

"But what can they do even then?" inquired Dick.

"For one thing, they might set fire to the hut, or there's an even quicker way to fix us."

"What's that, Zed?"

"Blow the whole place to blazes. It wouldn't take much stuff to do that."

"So that we may all be sent flying up in the sky without warning?" said Dick, who made a face at the prospect.

"Yes, dear boy, that's what we may expect."

"And what we shall receive, too," cried Dick, excitedly, "if we don't stop it."

"Stop it! How?"

"Do as we did before, Zed."

"You mean open the door of the hut?" inquired Ned.

"That's what I mean. If we stand with the door open, those Indians can't come up the bluff without our seeing them. Anyway, if we can't see them we shall hear them, and we shall have a chance to beat them back."

"Your plan is a good one. Don't you think so, Zed?" asked Young Klondike.

"It's the only thing we can do. Look out, everybody! I'm going to open the door!" and the Unknown, saying this, suited the action to the word.

But a terrible surprise was in store for the besieged party.

No sooner was the door open than a rush was made at it from without, evidently by some Indians who had been waiting there. They must have climbed the bluff silently whilst those in the hut were planning their mode of defense.

"Steady! Steady!" cried the Unknown, taken aback at the sudden onslaught, but retaining the coolness that rarely left him. "Stand your ground, friends! This is a fight to the death!"

It was a hand to hand struggle now. The Indians, trying to force a passage into the hut, were fighting mainly with clubs, which they swung with terrible energy. The Unknown was using his six-shooter, and so was Edith. Ned and Dick, grasping their rifles by the barrels, were bringing the butts down with great effect on the heads of the enemy.

"Kill! Kill!" cried the Indians, this being about as much English as they knew.

"Kill everybody but Peters!" shouted a voice. "I want him taken alive."

The half-breed's words encouraged his men, who for a moment had fallen back before the fierce defense that was offered to them, and they renewed the attack with fresh vigor.

In the struggle no one had noticed Peters.

The dying miner had left his bed whilst the fight was going on, and having secured his six-shooter he crawled towards the door of the hut, and whenever a chance offered itself he sent a bullet into the enemy.

Several of the Indians were on the ground now. Copper Bill came forward, hoping that his personal example might give heart to his men. Peters saw him and gave a cry of triumph.

This cry sealed his fate, for it drew the half-breed's attention to him, and before Peters could raise him-

self sufficiently to take aim, Copper Bill fired at his old foe.

"I'm a dead man!" gasped Peters, rolling over on the floor. "Don't forget Cedar Gulch, Young Klon——"

The man could not finish the sentence for death cut him short.

Ned, furious at what had happened, sprang at the half-breed to take vengeance on him for Peters' death, but the uplifted rifle was torn from his grasp by an Indian, and if the Unknown had not shot down Ned's assailant, Young Klondike would have been in great peril.

"Back! Back!" shouted Copper Bill, loudly. "The man's dead. We have nothing to stay for. Bring the wounded along and let us go!"

Instantly the attack ceased. The enemy carrying their wounded tore down the bluff as hard as they could, eager to get away from the rifles of those in the hut.

CHAPTER III.

THE FOG IN VALDES GLACIER.

DURING the confusion the lamp in the hut had been extinguished, so that everything was in total darkness there.

"Light the lamp, Zed," cried Ned.

"When I can find it, dear boy," answered the Unknown. "Ha! what's that," and as the detective uttered this exclamation, he went sprawling on the floor, his foot having tripped in something which was lying there.

Up again in an instant, the Unknown struck a light, hurrying to the lamp with it.

"Edith," exclaimed Ned, whilst this was being done, "I hope you are not hurt."

"I'm all right, Ned. But how quiet Dick is. Dick! Dick!" cried the girl, but there was no response.

Then, when the lamp was lit, they saw Dick stretched at full length on the floor, lying near the open door of the hut. He was quite motionless, and his face was perfectly white.

"He's dead!" cried Edith. "Oh! Dick! Dick! why don't you answer me?"

The Unknown and Ned, aghast at what they saw, and completely surprised, too, hurried towards the boy, and the detective bending over him, placed his hand on Dick's heart.

"He lives!" cried the Unknown, joyfully.

"You are sure?" asked Ned, most anxiously.

"There is no doubt of it," answered the Unknown. "Bring the light here and we will make an examination. Let us find out what is the nature of his injury, then we shall know what to do."

A few minutes' scrutiny was sufficient to show what had happened. Dick had received a blow on the head from an Indian club, which had knocked him senseless, and he was still quite unconscious.

They bathed the wound, and Edith attended to him very carefully, the Unknown looking on all the while with a critical eye.

"A few hours will see him nearly well," said the detective, at length, "for there is no concussion of the brain in my opinion."

"Can I do anything more than I am doing, Zed?" asked Edith.

"No. Keep his head cool and wait for results. Now, let us take a look at Peters. Perhaps he may be alive, too, Ned," said the Unknown.

"Impossible! Look!" and Ned pointed to a bullet hole just over the heart.

"Poor fellow," said the Unknown. "He's dead, sure enough. The only consolation is, that he hadn't very long to live in any case. What shall we do with him, Ned?"

"The first thing is to examine his clothes to see if there are any papers upon him."

"You think they may give us useful information about the gold deposits at Cedar Gulch?"

"No, Zed, but I shall certainly see that his poor wife gets anything he may have upon him."

"Right, Ned, right. You think of everything," cried the Unknown. "He hasn't a scrap of paper in his pockets. I've looked carefully."

"Very well. Now we must bury him."

"The ground is too hard for us to dig a grave," said the Unknown. "Let us wait till the morning and then we may find some place where we can lay him."

"I didn't want to waste time."

"But that wouldn't be wasting a minute. We can't possibly move with Dick in this state. By the morning he may be better."

"That's true. Yes, we'll pass the night here. How is Dick now, Edith?"

"I think he's better," answered Edith. "He's perfectly quiet and hasn't moaned for a long time."

"Let me try the infallible," said the Unknown, with a smile, producing the flask which was only used in case of emergency. "Raise his head, Edith, while I pour a few drops down his throat."

The liquid made Dick cough and open his eyes. He uttered a few words incoherently and then closed them again and his head sinking back, he seemed to fall into a tranquil sleep.

"He'll do," said the Unknown, in a decisive tone. "Lie down, Edith, and have some sleep. Ned and I will sit up to-night and watch him."

Edith looked at the Unknown indignantly.

"Do you imagine that I am going to rest with Dick in this state?" she asked, with flashing eyes. "I don't leave him until he's better."

Ned and the Unknown knew that it was useless to argue with Edith when she spoke like this, so they said nothing more upon the subject.

"Do you hear the dogs?" asked Ned, suddenly. "What a noise they're making."

"We had better see if we can't find some shelter for them for the night," said the Unknown, "and they must be fearfully hungry. Come along, Ned. Bring the lantern and let us attend to it at once."

"Bar the door, Edith," said Ned. "I imagine the

Indians have gone right away, but there's no telling. We shall be back to your assistance at the slightest noise."

Ned and the Unknown made a careful inspection of the hut and its surroundings by the aid of the lantern, and they were glad to find a kind of shed on one side of it, which would make an excellent resting place for the dogs till morning.

The sled had been left at the foot of the bluff, fastened to a tree to prevent the dogs from going off with it, and so it was found in the same place, the Indians not having interfered with it. The famished animals were soon in the shed, eating a hearty meal, at the conclusion of which they lay down and slept, huddling together for the sake of the warmth.

When Ned and the Unknown returned to the hut they found Dick sitting up.

"Why, this is great!" cried Ned. "I never expected to see you about again so soon."

"I'm all right, Ned," Dick replied.

"I think you will be in the morning anyway, and we don't start till then."

"How is Peters?" asked Dick, his recollection of the events of the night returning to him.

"Dead, poor fellow. Copper Bill put a bullet through his heart. But don't talk, Dick, you're not in a state to do that yet. Sleep, that is the best medicine you can take."

Dick tried to join in the talk with the others, but he was too weak, and in a very few minutes he was sleeping peacefully again.

As soon as daylight came the Unknown and Ned searched about for a burial place for poor Chris Peters, and as digging a grave was out of the question, they decided to lay the remains of the dead miner beneath a large heap of stones which was near the hut. Reverently this was done and then the two went back to the hut where Edith had prepared an excellent breakfast.

Dick showed by his appetite that his recovery was nearly complete, and he entered with interest into the talk that took place about their future movements.

"There really isn't much to talk about," said Ned, "because our course is quite clear. Whatever projects we may have formed have to be abandoned for the present, because we must push right on to Cedar Gulch."

"How about the Indians?" asked Dick.

"They won't interfere with us now Peters is dead, I'm thinking. Besides if they do I don't care. I'll go right on anyway, for it's a duty I owe to Peters. He confided this valuable secret to me and it seems to me it is a sacred duty we have to perform. We must get the gold so that his poor wife and children may have their share."

"You talk like a book, Ned!" cried the Unknown.

"Your heart's as sound as your head."

"Do you want anything?" asked Ned, laughingly.

"You don't give me all that taffy for nothing."

"How the best of us are misjudged," replied the

Unknown, severely. "No, I want nothing, except to remind you that we have to cross the Valdes glacier, and I prefer to do it in the daytime."

"Right you are, Zed. We'll start at once."

The dogs were now harnessed in the old sled, and when the foot of the bluff was reached rapid progress was made. At times the path was so rugged that the dogs could not drag the heavy-laden sled up the steep incline, and then Ned, Edith and the Unknown walked.

Ned insisted that Dick should rest, and this he had to do, though he protested that he was as well able to walk as the others were.

They were beginning now to recover from the effects of the previous night's scene, and as the weather was fine their spirits rose as they mounted towards the glacier.

When they reached it there was every prospect that their journey across it would be rapid and pleasant. The ice was covered with snow, and this made a good foothold for the dogs. The animals seemed delighted at the change from the terrible ascent they had just made to the comparatively level road across the Valdes glacier.

When they had gone five or six miles all was changed, and this, too, in a moment. A thick fog, that seemed to fall out of the sky, settled down over the glacier, and their view was completely obscured.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" cried the Unknown, "do you know what's going to happen next, Ned?"

"I'm not a prophet, Zed. Are you in that business?"

"Just enough to enlighten you now, dear boy. In a very few minutes, perhaps this moment, you, the sled and all of us will disappear down a crevasse."

"It's likely enough," said Dick. "We've had such experiences before."

"There's only one way to prevent that," remarked Ned. "And that is to stay where we are till the fog lifts. I don't want to do that, for it may mean passing the night on the glacier."

"I see our finish!" groaned the Unknown. "Thunder! Just in time!" cried the detective, as he grasped the reins and held the dogs back. "Ye gods and little fishes! Right on the edge of a crevasse, that time, Ned, was I right or no?"

The wind had swept the fog away at the very moment when the dogs stood on the verge of a crevasse in which they were about to leap. To have gone into it would have been certain death, for the chasm was of great depth, flooded by roaring waters at the bottom, whose awful sounds now reached the ears of Ned and his friends.

"By gracious!" cried Dick, "that was a close call and no mistake."

"We must have come right out of our way in the fog," Edith remarked.

"No doubt we did, and that's not to be wondered at, considering we had to travel by the compass," answered Ned. "However, the fog's lifting every

minute and we shall reach Copper Centre easily enough."

As everything was now clear for about two hundred yards on either side of them there was no danger of running into another crevasse, and consequently they sent the dogs along at their utmost speed, noting with joy that each minute the fog was lifting.

As it did so the full extent of the glacier began to be visible, and they saw that it was several miles wide, and extended so far ahead that they could not see where it ended.

Lofty peaks, perpetually snow-capped, rose on each side of the glacier to a great height, and it seemed as if at any moment the snow might descend in an avalanche and bury them, for they were traveling close to the rocks on one side.

"This is what I call life," shouted Dick, joyfully. "My head's quite well now. What do you think of it, Edith?"

"It's great, Dick. I almost wish the glacier were twice as long."

"So would I," cried Ned, "if I wasn't in a hurry to get to Cedar Gulch."

"Huh! Huh!"

A fierce shout broke on their ears at this moment, and looking across the ice they saw a band of men running towards them, waving clubs, and uttering savage cries. There was no mistaking who they were, for Ned and his friends recognized them instantly as the same band of Indians which had made the raid on Chris Peters' hut under the leadership of Copper Bill.

The half-breed was with them still. He kept, in accordance with his custom, in the background, urging his followers on to the attack, and running after them as they came towards the sled.

"I could bring that man down," said Edith, raising her rifle to her shoulder, "if those poor creatures with him were not in the way. I don't want to shoot them, but he's a murderer and deserves to be shot."

"He's firing at us anyway," cried the Unknown, "and a bullet went very close to me then. We must give them a volley."

"No! no!" shouted Ned, "I don't want that."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" cried the Unknown. "Are we to act as living targets? I guess not! I'm going to let them hear from me in return. It's only polite to do so."

"Don't shoot, Zed," cried Ned. "I think we can escape without bloodshed, and you know, although I'm not afraid of much, I don't care for fighting when it can be avoided. 'Round with the dogs, Zed, use the whip on them and we'll get away."

The Unknown reluctantly did as Ned suggested, and now the dogs were racing away from the Indians, the latter meanwhile making desperate efforts to keep up with them.

As yet no shot was fired, for most of the Indians were armed only with clubs which were useless weapons, except at close quarters.

"I hope you understand one thing, Ned," said the

Unknown. "In case you don't I would like to tell you that at every stride the dogs are getting further from Copper Centre."

"I know it and it can't be helped," answered Ned, "and I know something more, and that is that the dogs are leaving the Indians behind at every stride."

"You're wrong, Ned," cried Edith. "The dogs are weakening fast. Listen to their breathing. They've become exhausted."

Ned turned pale as he realized the truth of what Edith had said.

"Have your rifles ready?" he asked. "This means a fight to the death now, and we must shoot them down before they can close in on us."

But though Ned spoke so bravely, his inward thoughts were gloomy, and he could not conceal from himself the feeling that the chances of himself and his friends in this fight in the open against fifteen fierce enemies were not promising.

But just then another of those startling changes, which are so common on the glacier, came to the rescue of Ned and his companions. Once more the fog came down upon them like a pall, hiding everything from view and thus shielding them from the enemy's attack.

"Get out some of that meat, Zed!" cried Ned in a whisper. "Quick! we must keep the dogs quiet. If they bark the Indians will track us easily."

This expedient sufficed to keep the dogs quiet, and when the fog lifted an hour later, not a living soul could be seen on the glacier. Once more the sled started and the rest of the journey to Copper Centre was made without a sight of the Indians being obtained.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOURNEY TO CEDAR GULCH.

THERE was a hotel at Copper Centre kept by one Jim Casey, and when they came to it they halted.

A man was standing outside the house whose appearance had attracted their attention from a distance. He was a rather lank person, dressed in a suit of rusty black, with a dirty white choaker, a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat of a clerical shape; he had a large, white face, flabby looking and unhealthy.

"My friends," said this individual, raising his hands as if he was bestowing a blessing upon the party, "welcome to Copper Centre."

"That's very kind of you, sir," answered Dick.

"Why, it's Young Klondike!" cried Jim Casey, running out of his house. "Glad to see you here again, boss!"

Before Ned could speak, the clerical-looking person ran at him and grasped his hand, which he shook vigorously.

"And is this the famous Young Klondike I see before me?" he cried. "Oh, what joy to meet with one whose name is a household word in this land of snow and ice. My friend, you are doubly welcome to Copper Centre."

The stranger began to feel in his pockets, but in a moment he gave up the search.

"I was laboring under the impression," he said, "that I had my card with me, but in this wild country we forget social observances. Permit me to introduce myself. My name is Job Perkins. I should be glad to know your friends."

"These are my partners," said Ned. "Dick Luckey and Edith Welton."

"And who is this gentleman?" inquired Mr. Perkins, looking curiously at the Unknown.

The Unknown had never moved from where he stood when Job Perkins first began to speak, and he had kept his eyes upon the stranger with a persistency that worried the man in the white choaker.

Before Ned could introduce the Unknown the latter darted into Casey's.

"You shall know our friend later," said Ned. "He's a very good fellow, but has a strange manner with him sometimes, as you may have noticed."

"My dear young friends, can it be," said Perkins, "that he objects to me? Shall I go after him and try to soothe him?"

"Guess you'd better not, mister," cried Ned, laughingly. "You mightn't like your reception."

"In a good cause I will risk anything," the lank man replied. "But come, my young friends, unfold your plans to me. I am an elderly man, able and willing to give you advice. Do not hesitate to ask for it and profit by it."

"Thanks!" said Ned. "If we want any of it we'll let you know."

"Where may you be going now?" asked Perkins, as Ned was turning away.

"Mister," answered Ned, "I'm going to inquire if Casey can give us some dinner, for I'm hungry, I can tell you, and so are my friends."

"Shall I join you?" cried Job. "Shall I entertain you whilst you eat with improving talk?"

"Not to-day," said Ned, laughingly. "Thank you very much for the offer, though. That's a queer fellow, Dick," he added, when they had left Job Perkins.

"What did you think of him, Edith?"

"I don't like his looks at all, Ned. I advise you to be on your guard."

"Oh, he's all right, Edith," said Dick, laughingly; "he amuses me and I shan't be sorry to see a little more of him. Say, where's the Unknown, Ned? We don't want to eat without him."

"You bet we don't. I'll have a look for him, though. He has slipped away."

Ned went away, returning in a few minutes saying he had been told that the Unknown had left Casey's by a door at the rear and no one knew where he had gone.

"Wherever he is, he's safe enough," said Ned, "so let us eat. If the Unknown was hungry he'd be here fast enough."

That night they anxiously awaited the Unknown's return, but as he did not come back it was concluded that he had made one of his mysterious disappear-

ances. When he did so search for him was always in vain, and in his own good time the detective always returned to his friends.

The next morning Ned, Edith and Dick were standing outside Casey's talking with the clerical person they had met on the previous day. As a matter of fact, Mr. Perkins was doing the talking, the others were merely listening.

All at once a man sprang from the doorway, bringing his hand down heavily on the shoulder of Mr. Job Perkins, throwing him on to some mining implements which made anything but a soft bed for him on which to lie.

"Ha! my man at last!" cried the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah! you're in my clutches now! Watch me put the bracelets on his wrists, Young Klondike! Ye gods and little fishes! Wrong again!"

And the Unknown, taking Mr. Perkins by the collar, lifted him on to his feet.

"Sir," said the Unknown, lifting his hat and bowing down to the ground, "accept my sincere apologies for the mistake that has been made."

"You're mad!" shouted Mr. Perkins, furiously, entirely losing his clerical manner. "Stark, staring mad, to treat an inoffensive stranger like this. You ought to be in an insane asylum."

Mr. Perkins' flabby white face had turned red now, and he breathed hard, whilst he brushed the dirt off his soiled clothes.

"My dear sir," said the Unknown, laying his hand on Job's arm, "your anger is only natural, but it grieves me to see you in this state. Allow me to put matters straight. I can explain everything to your entire satisfaction."

"I don't wish to hear you!" cried the angry Perkins, turning his back on the Unknown.

"I suppose I must give him an explanation as usual," muttered Ned. "The Unknown gets into these scrapes and leaves me to pull him out of them. Sir," said Ned, addressing the stranger, "I should like——"

Before Ned could say another word Mr. Job Perkins stalked majestically away, withering, or at least trying to wither, the party with a scornful glance as he passed.

We may as well set forth the explanation which Ned was unable to give.

The Unknown claimed to be a detective and his friends really believed that he was one. He had traveled, or said he had, over the greater part of the globe in search of a mysterious individual, supposed to be a criminal, whom he invariably called his man.

What this man had done no one knew, nor who he was, for this was a mystery the Unknown refused to explain.

The detective had fallen in with Young Klondike on the way to Alaska, and he had traveled around with Ned for more than a year. During the whole of this period he had carefully concealed his identity, and so he was always called the Unknown.

"You make me tired!" cried Ned, as soon as Job Perkins' back was turned. "Tired! I tell you this sort of behavior is perfectly childish. I wonder you don't grow out of it."

"It's ridiculous!" said Dick. "Just see what you have done now. You've lost us the services of a man who might have been very useful to us, for he seems to know this country thoroughly. Worse than that, in all likelihood you've turned him into an enemy."

"And before I riled him," said the Unknown, "he was a friend, I suppose?"

"He appeared to be."

"I hope you didn't tell him all your plans."

"I told him nothing."

"That's a good thing. See here, you don't suppose I've been wasting my time since last night, do you?"

"Can't say what you've been doing, and don't care," Ned answered sharply, for he was still angry.

"Anyway you'd better know," the Unknown went on. "When we arrived at Casey's yesterday, directly I set eyes on that clerical gent I knew what we were up against. He's not 'my man' I admit, but, by gosh, he's bad enough to be. I went right away and I questioned Casey about him, and I found that Casey had no better opinion of him than I had."

"Mere suspicion, I suppose," said Ned.

"Did you find anything definite about him, Zed?" asked Dick.

"Yes. I discovered that he intends to start on a trip up the Copper river very soon, and where do you think he's going?"

"How should I know?" said Ned. "Copper river's something of a stream."

"Well, Ned," said the Unknown, "he's going to Cedar Gulch."

"Cedar Gulch!" exclaimed Ned, with a start. "That's strange! Wonder what he's going there for?"

"He might be going up to convert the heathen," said the Unknown, "seeing he looks something of a parson, or he might be traveling there for his health, but as he's been buying mining tools, rendrocks, and stores, it looks as if he was off on a prospecting expedition."

"You think he's going to seek the very gold we're after, Zed?"

"That's precisely what I do think. In fact, I haven't a doubt about it."

"But how should he know of this gold?" inquired Edith.

"That's an easy question," said the Unknown. "Before Peters crossed the Valdes glacier he stopped here for a few days with his partner, Perkins being at the hotel at the same time. It's likely enough that our clerical friend overheard the talk that took place between the two men, and this must have given him the clew on which he's working. Anyway, I know positively, that he's told several people round here before we came that he's off for Cedar Gulch, so you can draw your own conclusions."

"One conclusion I've drawn very quickly," cried Ned.

"And what's that, dear boy," asked the Unknown.

"Why, that we'll leave Copper Centre at once, so as to be first on the ground. If Perkins comes along after it won't matter much."

"I hope he will," said the Unknown, laughingly. "That dismal face of his will be worth looking at when he sees us at work. Ha, ha, here he comes. Don't tell him anything, Ned."

"No, no; leave me alone. I know what I'm doing," answered Ned. "Did you speak, sir?" he asked, addressing Job Perkins.

"Yes, my dear young friend," answered Mr. Perkins. "I was about to invite you all to partake with me of a bountiful repast."

"We have no time," replied Ned. "We are leaving here immediately."

"Going? Oh, let us not part in anger," Perkins exclaimed, rushing over to the Unknown and grasping his hand. "I forgive you, my friend, I forgive you freely."

"We'd better go," said the Unknown to Ned. "There's nothing to wait for in there?"

"Nothing."

"Where are you going, my friends?" asked Mr. Perkins, anxiously. "Let us hope we shall meet again."

"If we do, look out," muttered the Unknown.

"We are going up the Copper river," answered Ned. "Up to the head waters, likely enough, and we may get across the mountains and try and strike the White river, and so on to Dawson. Whip up, Dick. Good-by, Casey!" cried Ned. "Hope to see you again some day."

The last they saw of Mr. Job Perkins as their sled dashed down towards Copper river, disclosed him in a characteristic attitude. He had his hands uplifted, as when they saw him first, as if in the act of blessing them, and the Unknown would have shaken his fist at him if Ned had not restrained him.

"I believe you're right after all, Zed," said Young Klondike. "He's a precious old scoundrel in all probability, but as we are not likely to see him again, we might just as well be civil to him."

The dogs were going well, for they had had a night's rest and plenty of food, and in addition the traveling was easy. Of course it could not be expected that it would continue so the whole way, and nobody was surprised when it became necessary to unharness the dogs, unload the sled, and carry both the sled and other stores across some great boulders that effectually barred the path.

This occupation was so laborious and took so long that when darkness came they found, according to their calculations, that they had not traveled more than half the distance they intended to go.

"I suppose we'd better stay here," said Ned. "I'm dead tired, and I guess everybody else is. I don't think there's any fear of Perkins being before us."

"Not the slightest," answered the Unknown. "He has neither dogs nor sled, as I found out, so, of course, he'll have to tramp it."

"We can get all the shelter we need under those bowlders," said Edith, "even if a storm should come on. If one of you will make a fire I'll see if I can't provide a good supper."

There was plenty of wood lying about, and in a very few minutes they had a roaring fire blazing behind one of the bowlders, and Edith very shortly had hot coffee ready for them.

Whilst they were eating the talk fell on the Indians.

"I made special inquiries about them at Copper Centre," said Ned, "and my opinion is that they've gone a long way up the river, very much further than we intend to go."

"Guess not," said the Unknown. "They were traveling across the glacier when we last saw them walking round, so they can't have gone very far yet. We must keep a watch to-night."

"Certainly," said Ned. "There's nothing like being on the safe side."

Wrapped in their mission blankets under the bowlders, a comfortable night was passed. Edith slept sound the whole night through, but Ned, Dick and the Unknown each took a watch in turn.

In the morning after breakfast they were off again, and before noon they saw ahead of them, near the river, a large grove of trees which they immediately saw were cedars.

"Hooray!" cried Dick, jumping off the sled and running alongside it as it went up a hill. "That's Cedar Gulch for sure."

A nearer acquaintance with it satisfied them that this was indeed the place to which they had been directed by Chris Peters, and what confirmed them in this view was that they saw around signs of prospecting.

"This is where Peters has been digging," said Ned. "There can't be a doubt of it."

"Maybe it's where he got that wonderful pan of gold he showed us," said the Unknown.

"We'll very soon find out," cried Ned, excited at the prospect of finding the treasure of which Peters had spoken. "Here's a shaft already sunk; let us work it."

Dick had gone down to begin the work, being lowered into the hole by Ned and the Unknown, when Edith gave a startled cry.

"Look! Look!" she exclaimed. "What does this mean?"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" cried the Unknown, turning round suddenly, "as I live, the Indians again!"

CHAPTER V.

THE UNKNOWN PLANS A SURPRISE FOR THE INDIANS.

"Down! Down!" cried Ned, instantly throwing himself on the ground. "They've not seen us, and perhaps they won't."

At once the Unknown followed Ned's example, and

the two lay perfectly flat on the earth. Edith was well hidden from sight, for she was behind a large rock.

"Say," cried Dick, from the bottom of the shaft, "what's the matter? Guess there's something wrong, isn't there?"

"Keep still and don't say a word," answered Ned, and Dick, who knew there was a good reason for this did as he was told.

For some time no one ventured to move, but finally Ned turned towards the place where the Indians had been seen, and found they had disappeared. It was necessary, however, to act with caution, so he waited for some time yet before he ventured to rise.

"They seem to have gone," he said at length, after looking around in every direction. "It was a lucky thing you saw them, Edith, or we should have had another fight on our hands."

"Do you think they were the same men who attacked Peters' hut?" asked Dick, who had come out of the shaft to see what was going on.

"I had a poor chance to see, Dick, but I imagine they are."

"Let us make sure they have gone right away," said the Unknown.

"How can we do that?" Ned inquired.

"One might follow them by keeping under cover of these trees. There's no danger of them seeing us."

The Unknown and Ned accordingly followed this plan, and when they came to the extreme limit of the cedar trees they halted. There, in the river below, were several canoes, filled with Indians who were paddling away up stream. Ned and the Unknown stood watching them until they passed out of sight.

"That's satisfactory," said Ned. "No doubt those were the same gang we fought with on Caribou creek. Anyway they've gone, so we can work in peace."

Dick and Edith were delighted at the satisfactory report which was brought back, and without any delay Dick returned to his work at the bottom of the shaft.

He sent up several buckets of dirt, and whilst Ned was hauling them up to the surface, the Unknown was carrying water from the river for washing.

The dirt was thrown into the rocker and washed without delay, and they all stood by waiting anxiously for signs of gold, but not a trace of color appeared.

"Shall we try any more?" asked Dick.

"Yes, we'll dig about a foot deeper, and see what that produces," answered Ned.

This was done, but the result was precisely the same.

"I'm beginning to think we made a mistake when we started on this shaft," said Ned. "It doesn't seem as if Peters got his gold from here. Suppose we try a new place entirely? Let us have a look round and fix on a likely spot."

Ned was quite an expert miner and when any prospecting was to be done, his friends were generally ready to rely on his judgment. He had studied very

closely the way in which gold was deposited, and usually knew where it was likely to be found.

In a very short time Ned had arrived at a conclusion.

"We'll try right here," he said, selecting a spot nearer the river than the shaft in which they had been working.

Mining in the Klondike is very different from the same kind of operation elsewhere.

Winter and summer the ground is frozen, and it is therefore absolutely necessary to thaw it. This is done by lighting huge fires, which are kept burning for a great while, fresh fuel being constantly heaped upon the flames, until eventually the earth is rendered soft and the pickax and shovel can get to work.

Ned and his friends were located amid a great forest of cedars, so they had an abundance of wood close at hand, and in a few minutes the frost fire was started.

This fire was kept burning all night, and in the morning they set to work with a will.

The ground was now thawed, but still working was heavy, and it was a couple of days before they reached the sand, about twenty feet below the surface where they expected the gold to be.

The first washing of dust from a new shaft is always watched very closely, and they looked keenly into the rocker for signs of color. Again they were disappointed. There was no sign of gold, and even when they had dug deeper the same result followed.

"This is a bully strike, I don't think," cried Dick, disgusted at the result of their labor. "I'm beginning to have my suspicions of Peters. It's likely enough that Cedar Gulch isn't the place where he got his gold after all."

"I don't agree with you," replied Ned. "What possible object could he have in deceiving us? He sent for me, I didn't run after him, and he knew he was dying when he revealed his secret. What is your opinion, Zed?"

"I'd as soon work here as anywhere else," answered the Unknown.

"Yes, we know that," cried Dick, laughingly. "You're so fond of it, Zed."

"There is gold here," said Ned, after a few moments' silence, and speaking in a very determined tone. "I am sure of it, and you'll admit that I've not often been wrong. This is what we will do: we will start a drift and see what that brings. We may strike into a deposit and can then sink a new shaft on the lead."

No one had any objection to this plan, and it was adopted. The first bucket sent up and washed showed signs of color, and encouraged them to proceed, and each succeeding bucket gave better results. In half an hour they had obtained nearly five hundred dollars' worth of gold.

"Nothing like what Peters led us to expect," said Ned, "but still we've found gold, and perhaps we'll strike a bonanza yet."

"Ned, Ned!" cried Dick, from the drift.

"Well?"

"We've struck it this time and no mistake. By gracious, the dirt's full of gold!"

Ned and Edith washed the dirt that had caused Dick to become so excited, and they gave a great shout when they saw the heap of small nuggets left in the rocker.

"Five hundred dollars' worth at least!" cried Ned. "We've struck it, we've struck it!"

Just then Ned heard a footstep behind him, and turning saw that it was the Unknown who had just returned from a stroll.

To Ned's intense surprise the detective immediately extinguished the lantern by which they had been working.

"What does this mean?" cried Ned, angrily.

"You'll know in time, dear boy," replied the Unknown, coolly. "Dick," he continued, speaking down the shaft, "come up at once."

"But I've struck it rich, Zed. I'm crazy to keep at it."

"There's a time for everything, Dick, and this time you'd better do as I tell you. Put out your light and come up."

Dick came up very reluctantly, and when he did so Ned demanded an explanation.

"Dear boy," replied the Unknown, "it's better to live than to get gold, and we're in great danger now. The Indians are closing in on our camp."

"The Indians!" exclaimed the two boys.

"I have seen them. That's why I hurried back and put out the light."

"How strong are they?" inquired Ned.

"A dozen, at least. Now listen to my plan, Ned. I think it's the best under the circumstances. I think we ought to abandon our camp at once."

"Run away from those fellows!" cried Ned, indignantly. "Not much. I prefer to make a fight of it."

"My plan includes fighting," said the Unknown, laughingly, "and plenty of it, too, or I'm very much mistaken. But we'll manage so that we get the best end of it. See here, Ned, if we retreat among the cedars, the Indians will be in a fix. They will rush on our camp and find it deserted."

"Well?"

"Then while they're standing bewildered we open fire on them. It's my opinion the sudden surprise will make them run."

"It's worth trying, certainly," answered Ned. "Everybody get his rifle at once, for I guess we've no time to lose."

Ned and his friends halted about one hundred yards from the diggings. They found a spot which was adapted for defense if it was necessary to adopt such a proceeding. Several large cedars grew close together, and between them rising from the ground were a number of great bowlders, so the place was a fort on a small scale.

It was absolutely dark beneath the trees, and so

neither the Indians nor the other party could watch each other's movements.

"Be ready, boys!" said the Unknown in a whisper.

"You can't see anything," answered Dick.

"No, but I hear them. I know what they're going to do," the Unknown observed, "they're creeping up to the camp, and when they get near enough they'll make a rush. Ha! was I right?"

As he spoke a fierce yell came from the vicinity of the camp, and instantly the noise of men rushing to an attack was plainly heard.

"Surrender!" cried a voice that was familiar to them.

"Copper Bill himself," muttered Ned. "The scoundrel! How I should like to get a shot at him! Just one!"

"Keep quiet, Ned," said the Unknown. "The time for shooting hasn't come yet."

"Kill them if they don't yield!" shouted the half-breed, angrily.

"No white man here, chief. He gone," replied an Indian.

"What is that you are saying, Black Rabbit? No white man here? Bosh! I saw them working in these camps an hour ago, and they can't have heard us come up."

"Me no see white man," replied Black Rabbit.

"See! Guess not," answered Copper Bill, angrily.

"Who in thunder could see in the dark? Ha! here's a lantern. Light it."

"Just what I expected," chuckled the Unknown, rubbing his hands. "As soon as the lantern is lit give them a volley. It's very kind indeed of them to show where they are. Now is our time!"

Four rifles were waiting now to pour shot into the Indian ranks, and as soon as the light showed the guns were fired. The shots were followed by fierce cries and howls of pain and rage.

"Another!" exclaimed Ned.

Immediately four more shots were fired, and as two cries of pain were immediately uttered, Ned judged that some damage had been done.

"Now skip," he said, quietly.

"But why?" asked Dick.

"Because, Dick, they'll never find us if we change our position. If we don't they'll get onto us for sure. Move gently, for the least sound will give us away."

After Ned and his friends had moved they could hear the Indians talking over matters, but in so low a tone that nothing that was said could be distinguished.

The Unknown was delighted at the success of his plan, and so far it had been complete, for Young Klondike and his friends had not been fired at, and their whereabouts was still a secret to the Indians.

"It's a wonder they don't search for us," said Dick.

"Guess they will. They haven't gone yet, Dick," replied Ned. "Don't shout till we're out of the woods."

At this moment great flames commenced to shoot up in the air, and in a few minutes more a huge fire was blazing near the diggings. Not an Indian could be seen, however, and this was surprising. For a long way around everything was as bright as day, and yet not one of the enemy was visible.

"Don't quite get onto their game," said the Unknown, uneasily. "We know they're not gone because some one must have lighted the fire. Where are they and why did they light that fire, anyhow? That's what I want to know."

"Give it up!" cried Ned. "It beats me!"

"Shall I tell you what I think?" said Edith.

"Do, Edith. You very often put us on the right track when we're in a fix."

"Well, Ned, my idea is that the fire is lighted so that the whole neighborhood may be lit up, and our hiding place shown."

"That sounds reasonable enough," said Ned.

"And," continued Edith, "the Indians are hiding behind those stones near our diggings."

"That can soon be found out," cried Ned. "We can crawl right round and take them in the rear."

"We shall be seen," said Dick.

"Not if we glide along the ground," replied Ned. "These rocks protect us, and we're almost beyond the range of the fire as it is. It's worth trying, for if it's successful, I don't think the Indians will trouble us much more to-night."

Undoubtedly it was worth the risk to achieve such a desirable result, and when they had gone a few yards they found that their task was simple enough, because they discovered that the darkness absolutely concealed them from view.

Down they crawled, making a very wide circuit towards the river, and when they reached the stream, they crept along the bank under shelter, in the direction of the diggings. The blazing fire guided them to the spot.

The Unknown cautiously raised his head, and at first he could not see the slightest sign of an Indian. But, looking intently in the direction of the fire, at length, against the bright flames, he saw an Indian spear which had very unwisely been lifted too high by its owner.

"Edith was right, Ned," said the Unknown. "The enemy is right between us and the fire, and not more than one hundred yards away. Those blame cusses'll be mighty sorry they paid us a visit after we're through with them. Don't waste time. Let them have it!"

The Unknown explained to the others where he had located the Indians, and two sharp volleys were sent in at once.

With furious cries at least a dozen men sprang to their feet from behind the rocks, their dark forms showing out clearly in the blaze of light, which formed the background to the scene.

Despite all Copper Bill could say or do, his men would not remain, and taking their wounded with them, they lost not a moment in departing, their

angry leader railing at them and threatening as they hurried away.

This ended the first day's fight on Copper river.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE UNKNOWN PICKED UP A BLACK RABBIT IN THE RIVER.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" cried the Unknown, "I understand now why our friend Peters didn't stay up here digging for gold. I'm fond of a little excitement, boys, but this is getting just a bit too lively for me."

"Anyway, we've taught those fellows a lesson which they won't forget in a hurry," said Ned. "We must have hit some of them I think."

"Supposing we go back to the camp?" observed Dick. "It's safe enough now."

It was not likely that the Indians would return for some time, even if they came back at all, but all that night a close watch was kept, and it was passed in total darkness, as it was not deemed safe to light the lantern. They were all glad enough when morning came.

"Don't you think a little talk about our future proceedings would be in order, dear boy?" asked the Unknown, as they were having breakfast.

"There's nothing to talk about," answered Ned. "As soon as we're through with this meal, we'll start work right away."

"But the Indians?" exclaimed the Unknown.

"They're gone."

"Still they may come back."

"No doubt they may, and so we must keep our eyes open as we work."

"Guess I'd better do some scouting while you work," said the Unknown. "If I don't those blamed cusses will be on you before you know it."

"Very well, Zed, you attend to that part of the business," said Young Klondike.

"The Unknown has a cinch!" cried Dick.

"I'm not so sure about that," remarked the detective. "I believe those Indians are mighty near now, and if we get through to-day without a fight, no one will be more surprised than yours truly."

When the Unknown had departed, the two boys and Edith set to work at the mine. The last lot of dirt they had washed as the Indians made their appearance on the preceding night was so rich that they were eager to get more. As fast as the dirt came from the drift, Ned and Edith washed it in the rocker, and there was not a pan but contained many nuggets, also dust and some flake gold.

"A few weeks of this, and we shall have a big pile," said Ned.

"It's a great find," cried Dick, from the drift. "Peters knew what he was talking about."

"You bet he did," replied Ned. "Where we're working now was formerly the bed of a stream which ran into the Copper river. The water washed the gold down, and the nearer we get to the river the richer we'll find it. I'm mighty glad. It's a good

thing for us, and it's a great thing for Mrs. Peters and her children."

"Poor things!" said Edith. "This gold will help them to get over their loss. I should like to see the poor woman's face when she gets your letter, Ned, for of course you will write to her."

"You bet I will as soon as I have anything big to write about, Edith."

"Whoop! whoop!" rang out the cry in the distance.

Ned sprang to his feet and Edith was so startled by the cry that she dropped the pail in which she had been carrying water. Dick, in the drift, heard it too, and instantly stopped work.

"Hello! Hello! Who shouted then?"

"There's no mistake about that voice," cried Ned, as the shouting was repeated. "That's the Unknown. Come up, Dick, something's going on and we must go at once and see what it is."

Ned, Edith and Dick started off at a run in the direction from which the cries had proceeded, and as the shouts still continued there was no danger of their losing their way.

"What can it be?" exclaimed Edith.

"Maybe the Unknown's met a bear," suggested Dick, "and is having trouble with it."

"Or else an attack is about to be made on our camp," said Ned, "and he's running back to warn us and shouting as he runs. We shall know in a minute."

Coming to the edge of the bluff which was close to the river, Ned was well in advance of the others, who were also running.

An extraordinary sight presented itself.

In the middle of the river stood the Unknown struggling desperately with a gigantic Indian, who seemed to be getting the better of the fight. To and fro they swayed, with the water rising as high as their waists.

On the other side of the river at the same time, appeared a number of Indians, running at their utmost speed towards the river.

Ned instantly brought his rifle to his shoulder.

"Help, help!" shouted the Unknown. "Shoot him, Young Klondike! Shoot him, or I'm a goner!"

"Ugh, ugh!" grunted the Indian. "No shoot, white boy! See, Black Rabbit no got gun! Dis a fair fight. Let paleface show Indian which is de best man!"

"Fire, fire!" roared the Unknown. "Take no notice of this cuss!"

It was very easy for the Unknown to say "fire," but it was an almost impossible thing to send in a shot with any certainty of hitting Black Rabbit, the enemy. The two men moved about so quickly that at one moment the Unknown was nearest his friends, and at the next the Indian was between him and them.

"You're the best shot, Edith!" cried Ned, unable to know how to act. "If you can get the slightest chance try your hand."

"Those Indians are running up fast, Ned!" ex-

claimed Dick. "Whilst Edith is watching the Unknown and Black Rabbit, let us shoot and keep the others back."

"Good! Blaze away, Dick!" shouted Ned. "Those fellows will find they've made another mistake."

Ned and Dick began to fire at once, and this checked the Indian advance, but only for an instant, for when they found no one was hit they came on again, leaping in the air, waving their spears and clubs, and yelling like demons.

"Hit one or two, Ned!" shouted Dick. "That's the way to scare them off."

"I'm trying hard enough. Ha, there goes one buck, he's had his dose," cried Ned. "No, he's up again, but he's hit all the same."

"I have a man down. Hooray!" cried Dick. "Talk about sport, guess this wants a lot of beating."

"Edith," said Ned, "do you see that man lying down on the bluff behind some stones?"

"Yes, Ned."

"That's Copper Bill, the leader of this gang. He's got his rifle ready to fire at the Unknown, as soon as he gets loose. Try and hit him."

Edith followed this advice, but it was no easy task to put a bullet into the half-breed, for only the top of his head was now visible, and the girl, although she hit the stones around him, failed to reach the mark.

At this moment the Unknown, after a desperate struggle, broke loose from Black Rabbit, and springing back in the water a few feet, avoided the savage blow which the Indian made at him with his club. Finding he had missed, Black Rabbit plunged beneath the water towards the shore on which his friends were, and the Unknown came dashing through the stream, whilst the bullets flew around him.

Copper Bill was firing fast now and it was quite a miracle that the detective escaped. He would not have done so but for the steady fire that Edith directed at the half-breed, and which was so persistent that it quite disturbed his aim.

The Unknown reached the bank safely, throwing himself behind some stones as he got there, for he felt that he had acted as a target long enough already.

Meanwhile Ned and Dick had been shooting with effect, and more than one Indian had been hit. Black Rabbit had reached the shore, and before anyone could get a shot at him he had plunged into some bushes and disappeared. This was the signal for the Indians to withdraw, and as they dived behind the trees, Copper Bill managed to crawl out of reach of Edith's rifle.

"All right, Zed!" cried Ned. "The coast is clear now. You can show yourself."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" shouted the Unknown, "but that's about as hot a time as I've had lately. Ye gods and little fishes! at one moment, Ned, I thought I had passed in my checks."

"You must have been crazy," said Ned, "to try and get the better of an Indian more than twice as

big as yourself by sheer strength. Why didn't you use your rifle?"

"Yes, that's it!" cried Dick, "and why did you go into the river at all? What was the necessity?"

"Dear boy," said the Unknown, "let me tell my story. I came down here to do some scouting, and as soon as I did I noticed a bluff on the other side which was a blame sight higher than anything on this, so I determined to get to it, for I knew I'd see a good many miles all around me if I did, so off I started right away."

"Without your rifle."

"I admit that," said the detective, "and I had a reason for it. I thought the water was deep and I'd have to swim, so I left the gun behind. I'd no sooner got across than Black Rabbit appeared on this side the river. He made a dash to cut me off, and I skipped as lively as I could to get back to where I put my rifle. He was quickest, though, and we met in the stream. Now you know the whole story, Ned. That blame Indian gave me a terrible old rasping and I'm wet right through, but I'm not dead and you bet I'll live to square accounts with the noble red man before I die."

"What's to be done now?" inquired Dick. "We can't very well let matters rest as they are."

"Reckon I'll rest anyway," cried the Unknown, shaking the wet from his clothing.

"Dick's quite right," said Ned. "We have to work these diggings at Cedar Gulch. Now how can we do that if we're in constant fear of an attack from the Indians? It's quite impossible."

"You bet it is!" cried Dick. "We must follow those Indians up and teach them such a lesson that they will leave us alone in the future."

"That's our only plan," assented Ned.

"Dear boy," said the Unknown, "you must allow me to enter my protest against this programme. I get all the fighting I want without running after it."

"Very well," laughed Ned. "Stay here and take care of the diggings."

"Say, Ned," cried the Unknown, "are you really serious? Do you intend to pursue the Indians?"

"Certainly, if I can."

"In that case," said the Unknown, "I'd better go with you not to fight, but to see you don't get into trouble."

"We must cross the river!" cried Dick. "How shall we manage that? Walking through the water isn't exactly to my liking. It's not very warm, is it, Zed?"

The Unknown shivered from head to foot as a reply to Dick's question.

"We will follow the river," said Ned. "It's shallow, and it's as likely as not that before long we shall come to a place where we can ford it."

"And by the time we have found that place where will the Indians be?" cried the Unknown. "Miles and miles away."

"I don't think so," answered Ned. "It's not probable that they will expect to be pursued by us, so they

won't hurry themselves. No doubt we shall completely surprise them. Come on, let us make a move, we've wasted enough time already."

As they proceeded up the Copper river they saw that they would have great difficulty in carrying out their idea of fording the stream, because the river seemed to deepen instead of growing shallower, and in addition it increased in width.

"It's a case of swimming!" cried the Unknown.

"No, no," exclaimed Ned, "that's not to be thought of. Let us travel a mile or two further, Zed. You know what these rivers are, at any moment we may be able to see the bottom."

On they went again, toiling over the snow, without meeting with the slightest encouragement to proceed.

"We must make a raft!" cried Dick, at last.

"Yes, that's it," answered Ned. "A raft! The very thing!"

"A splendid idea," laughed Edith, "only seeing that we have no ax with us, and no cord either, it will be rather difficult to carry out."

Edith's objection was fatal to the scheme, for although there was an abundance of wood in the vicinity, they were powerless to make use of it.

"You have to give up your plan, Ned," cried the Unknown.

"Yes, for the time. But I mean to carry it out, Zed, all the same. We will go right back to the camp, build a raft there, take some supplies with us, and start against the Indians, ready to fight till we've whipped them. We've had two days' fighting with them already; the third day will finish the business, I hope."

"Or us," groaned the Unknown, dismally.

Back they went, the Unknown trying hard all the way to convince Ned that the plan he proposed was the best. This was to remain at the diggings, get out the gold, and stand ready at any moment to resist an Indian attack. An animated argument took place upon this point, and the time passed so quickly that they were in sight of the cedar trees that marked their diggings, in what seemed to them a very short time.

"No, no, Zed," said Young Klondike to finish the talk, "my mind's made up. We will fight the Indians. The diggings are always safe, for they can't run away."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" shouted the Unknown, standing on the bluff and looking towards the river with an amazed expression on his face. "It's very true, Ned, diggings can't run away, but ye gods and little fishes! who's to prevent the gold going? There's some one working at our diggings now!"

CHAPTER VII.

JOB PERKINS REAPPEARS ON THE SCENE.

THEY stood in silence for a few minutes listening closely.

The sounds of a pickax at work showed them there was some one at their diggings, though no one was visible.

"Quick work!" cried the Unknown. "That's about as smart a piece of claim jumping as ever I saw."

"But you don't suppose, Zed!" exclaimed Young Klondike, angrily, "that I'm going to allow it, do you? I'll fire the fellows right off, and there won't be much time wasted about it, either."

"You bet we will," cried Dick. "The firm of Golden & Luckey doesn't allow itself to be treated in this way."

Down they rushed towards the river, all of them curious to see who it was who had arrived during their absence, and great was their surprise to find that the intruder was no other than Job Perkins, the stranger they had fallen in with at Copper Centre.

Mr. Perkins had been sitting behind a rock, and he rose as they got near, and came towards them with an oily smile on his large, white face.

"Welcome to Cedar Gulch, dear friends," he said, extending his hand to Ned. "Young Klondike, this is indeed a joyful meeting, and all the more so that it is unexpected. Ahem!"

The man's coolness amazed Ned. As for the Unknown, he seemed paralyzed with astonishment.

"Once more welcome," said Job Perkins.

The repetition of this greeting aroused the Unknown.

"Say," he cried. "Things seem to me to be getting a little mixed. It's generally the people who own the place who welcome strange arrivals. You seem to have twisted things around a bit, Mr. Man!"

"Our friend," said Mr. Perkins, looking at Ned, and indicating the detective, "has still some peculiar ideas. He behaved strangely to me at Copper Centre, but I forgave him. I always forgive everybody. It is my nature," he added, with a wave of his hand. "I will even allow him to remain here."

"Mr. Perkins," said Ned, shortly, "we must come to an understanding, and the sooner we do so the better. I am just as surprised with what I see as my friend here is. I ask you to tell me in as few words as possible, and as plainly as you can what your presence in these diggings means."

"I am here to get gold, sir; to get gold."

"But these diggings belong to us."

"To you!" echoed Job Perkins, turning up his eyes in amazement until only the whites were visible.

"Certainly they belong to us," continued Ned. "We came here and located our claim. No one had dug here before us except a man named Peters, who is dead, and we represent him and are here with his consent, for he himself sent us to Cedar Gulch."

"He deceived you, my dear young friend," cried Job Perkins. "The world is full of deceit," he added, with a groan.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" exclaimed the Unknown, looking hard at him, "I believe you. That's the truest word you've spoken yet."

"Be quiet, Zed," said Ned. "Let us keep right to business. We must get to the bottom of this affair."

In what way did Peters deceive us? He told us of his find here."

"Peters did not find gold here. In saying so he strayed from the truth," answered Perkins. "There is only one man who struck gold at Cedar Gulch, and his name is Perkins. Yours truly. Ahem!"

"You!" cried Ned.

"Yes, my dear young friend. I am the individual."

"Come, come," cried Dick. "This is all stuff and nonsense. I don't believe a word of what you've said. The diggings are ours, and we intend to keep them. Mr. Perkins, you'd better get up and march quietly back to Copper Centre if you don't want to make a peck of trouble for yourself."

Mr. Perkins, so far from being offended at this outburst, walked over to Dick and took his hand.

"Do you believe in law, friend?" he asked, impressively, in solemn tones. "Law and order is my watchword. I trust it is also yours."

"What are you giving us?" cried Dick, angrily.

"Facts, my dear friend, facts," repeated Perkins, quite unmoved at the treatment he received. "Facts in black and white, read these, rash young man. They constitute my title to these diggings. Read them, if you please."

Saying this, Perkins showed Dick some papers, and then he thrust them into his hands.

"I trust you with them," he said, as he sat down on a rock and looked on smilingly. "I confide in everybody, even my enemy, which I trust you are not."

The Unknown and Ned, astounded at the turn of events, drew near to Dick and carefully perused the document. The papers appeared to be in perfect order, issued from the government offices, and certifying to the fact that Job Perkins was the owner of claim No. 84 at Cedar Gulch on the Copper river.

"Thunder!" cried the Unknown. "But this cuss has the best of us, Ned."

"It looks like it," said Dick. "These papers are dated some months back, certainly before the time when Peters struck gold here. It is a very strange circumstance."

They were talking together now some little distance from Perkins, who sat smilingly looking at them, seemingly rather proud of the consternation he had created.

"There's some trickery here," said Edith. "I'm sure of it. If there hadn't been, why should he have been so mysterious at Copper Centre?"

"But if he didn't strike gold here," said Dick, "how did he find it out? Peters declared to us that he had told nobody about it. By gracious, Ned, this is enough to drive a fellow crazy. Here's the richest strike we ever made, and as soon as we find it it's taken right away from us. I feel almost inclined to run him off this claim."

"That's not to be thought of," said Ned, quickly. "He has the law on his side, as he told us."

"Then suppose we come to terms with him?" ob-

served Dick. "He has only himself here and needs help. We'll assist him and go shares in the result."

"Half a loaf's better than nothing," said the Unknown.

Ned said nothing. His friends were surprised at his action, for it was seldom he failed to come to a prompt decision, no matter how difficult the problem offered for his solution happened to be. Dick, therefore, entered into a talk with Perkins.

"Those papers seem to clinch matters," said Dick. "Guess I'll have to take back some of the words I used."

"My friend, they passed unnoticed. Pray do not recall the circumstance. I am glad, however, to see that you do me justice. I am a man of honor and value my good name more than gold. What is gold, dear young friend? Dross!"

"Then," said Dick, quickly, "as you take that view of it we can come to terms easily. Name your price."

"Price! For what?"

"You want help to work this place. We'll go in with you."

"Yes, that's it," said the Unknown. "You don't value gold. We do, so you can have no objection."

"Ah! but I do object, and most strongly," said Perkins, raising his hand impressively. "This gold is given me for a purpose. For what? To be spent on my own enjoyment? No, a thousand times no, but to be devoted to works of charity and benevolence. I am a philanthropist."

"Then you refuse our offer?" cried Dick, angrily.

"I am compelled to do so," answered Perkins. "I must keep what has been given me."

"Yes, but you must do something more," said Young Klondike, coming hastily forward.

"Anything in reason, my dear young friend."

"Mr. Perkins," said Ned, "I must ask you to mark off your claim. As it stands now there is no limit to what you own. Now, then, where does your claim begin and where does it end? I have a right to ask that."

"Perfectly fair, perfectly so. I can have no objection to complying with your request. Young Klondike, I will proceed to do what you require at once."

With that Perkins rose from the rock and set to work to mark off his claim, Dick and the others looking on anxiously whilst he did so.

"Guess we'd better go on with our Indian raid," said the Unknown. "I didn't think so just now, but I've changed my mind. There's nothing to keep us here."

"We must wait and see what he does," answered Ned.

"It drives me mad," said Dick. "Of course we know what he'll do. Look! He's claiming everything where we've been working, and all the gold we expected to get will be his."

"Don't be too impatient, Dick," said Ned; "who knows what may happen. So you have marked off your claim, Mr. Perkins, have you?"

"Yes, as you see, Young Klondike, I am content

with this modest strip of land. The world is large, and there is an abundance of unclaimed land from which you can make a selection."

"By gosh!" muttered the Unknown. "I should just like to have you above for a few minutes, my philanthropic friend, you'd never forget it. Oh, no!"

"Well, sir," said Ned, "we have settled our little dispute, and I am glad of it. When you are neighbors it's as well to be friendly."

"So you intend to remain here?" asked Perkins.

"Yes, I shall stay and work the ground from this small creek where your claim ends down to the river. I may strike something."

"My best wishes go with you. May you prosper, you and all with you!"

As Mr. Perkins said this, he raised his hands in a manner that was habitual to him and turned up his eyes.

Dick bit his lips with rage, and the Unknown forced his plug hat down on his head. They were both mad. Meanwhile Perkins went down into the shaft, and quite regardless of Ned and his companions, began to work.

"Now," said Ned, "we'll do the same."

"What, same?" inquired Dick.

"Why, get to work of course."

"But you're not serious, Ned, are you?" asked Dick. "Surely you don't intend to work our claim?"

"Most decidedly I do, and if it turns out as I suspect, you won't be sorry, Dick, that we own it. I have a strong idea that we're going to come out of this deal better than Perkins. His gold, in my opinion, will peter out. I believe that the lead we struck when we were working at his diggings doesn't amount to much, and that the real bonanza is down here by the river. If he asked me to swap claims with him now, I wouldn't."

These remarks raised the spirits of Dick and the others, for they knew what a high authority Ned was on all matters connected with mining, for, since coming to the Klondike, he had studied the subject very closely, and when it came to prospecting for gold, Young Klondike had no superior.

The ground had to be thawed out again, and so a great fire was immediately lighted on the spot selected by Ned for the first trial. It was kept burning for hours. One of the party attended to the fire, whilst the others rested, being badly in need of sleep.

When the ground was sufficiently thawed they set to work, proceeding by the light of the fire and that furnished by the lanterns they had brought with them.

Perkins was also hard at work, carrying gold out of his diggings and then washing it. From words that reached their ears he seemed to be in luck.

"More gold!" he cried. "Dross! Filthy lucre! I will relieve the destitute with it!"

"That cuss is about the biggest hypocrite I ever struck!" exclaimed the Unknown, in a disgusted tone, "but I'll get square with him yet. The laugh's on me now, but wait!"

"Don't notice him," said Ned. "Let him say what he likes. It won't hurt us. This is easy work, boys, and one advantage of digging down here near the river, is that we don't have to go so deep to reach the sand."

They never paused at their work, Edith, as usual, doing her share, only stopping to prepare a meal for the party. As soon as they had eaten they were busy again.

Ned displayed more interest in the digging than his companions had ever seen him show. He wished to prove that his theories as to the lay of the gold were correct, and also to witness the dismay of Job Perkins, when he found out that he had made a mistake.

It was after midnight when the black sand was reached, and if there was any gold at all, it would be found in this deposit.

"What does it look like, Dick!" cried Ned, excitedly, when he found that Dick was working on the sand.

"Pull up the bucket and see for yourself," answered Dick. "It's too dark down here."

Edith, Ned and the Unknown all crowded around the first bucket that came from the shaft.

"Hooray!" cried Young Klondike, joyfully, stooping down and plunging his hand in the dirt. "Look at this! was I right or not?" and Ned held up a nugget as big as a hen's egg.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" shouted the Unknown. "Ned, you're a wonder. Gold! Gold!" he added, imitating Perkins, "dross! filthy lucre! You can relieve the destitute. I am the destitute," and he thrust the nugget into his pocket.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Ned and Edith, as they threw the dirt into the rocker and proceeded to wash it.

The result was astounding. It really seemed as if there was more gold than dirt in the pan, and after the dirt was washed away an abundance of nuggets of various sizes remained.

"How much, Ned?" cried the Unknown, excitedly.

"In this pan?"

"Yes."

"I estimate that there's eight hundred dollars' worth of gold there. It's a perfect bonanza!"

The shouting brought Job Perkins over from his claim to see what had caused so much excitement, and as each pan was washed he stood looking on at the work, speechless with amazement and having a very sad expression on his face.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THIRD DAY'S FIGHT WITH THE INDIANS.

SILENTLY Job Perkins walked back to his claim.

"Don't much like the look of things," said the Unknown, laughingly. "He must be sick, for he went away without leaving us his blessing."

"I believe there are two reasons for his gloomy looks, Zed," observed Young Klondike. "Have you

noticed how quiet he was at his work for the last hour or two?"

"Yes, I was struck by it."

"Take my word for it, Zed, his gold has petered out. Of course the second reason is the great find we have made. It will drive him crazy, much as he despises the yellow metal."

"Let us be a happy family," said a familiar voice behind them, and Perkins once more stood in their midst.

"There's no reason why we should quarrel," cried Ned. "No reason in the world."

"We will make one party," continued Perkins. "You and I, our young friend in the shaft, this dear young lady, and our erratic friend with the tall hat, one happy party, all working together in peace and harmony."

"What! Join your claim to ours and become partners?" exclaimed Ned.

"That was the idea I had formed in the interest of peace and happiness."

"Not on your life!" shouted Ned. "That scheme won't wash, Mr. Perkins. You stick to your claim and we'll keep to ours. The firm of Golden & Luckey isn't looking for any partners just now."

"And must we dwell apart?" inquired Perkins, casting up his eyes. "This is hard."

"That's about the size of it," replied the Unknown, cheerfully, "and between you and me, mister, I don't care how far apart it is."

"Greed! greed!" murmured Perkins. "I am an unwelcome guest. I will return to my solitude."

He went away, and they took no further notice of him, beyond making a few remarks on his proposal.

"A nervy cuss," said the Unknown. "That offer of his, Ned, beat the deck."

"It took my breath away at first," answered Ned. "I'll tell Dick about it."

When Dick heard of it he was not surprised, for he believed Perkins was capable of anything.

"He's a dangerous man, Ned," said Dick. "It's my opinion we shall have to keep an eye on him."

Ned did not agree with this view of the case, but the Unknown did, and the detective some time later thought he would go over and see what was taking place on the other claim.

He came back very shortly.

"Guess what's happened?" he cried.

"Perkins has died of grief," replied Ned, with a laugh.

"He's killed himself!" cried Dick. "Our lucky strike was too much for him."

"He's struck more gold," suggested Edith.

"All wrong," answered the Unknown. "He's skipped; that's what's the matter with him."

"Gone away, Zed?"

"No doubt of it. There's no sign of him anywhere. Even his mining tools have disappeared."

"So much the better," said Ned. "I don't like him, and the less I see of him the better I'm pleased."

"And I like to see him all the time, Ned," observed the Unknown. "Then I know what he's doing. He's more dangerous when he's out of sight."

"Pshaw! don't waste any more time on him. Let us keep right on at our work. He's gone back to Copper Centre and a good riddance to him."

"I don't think he has," replied the Unknown. "I wish I could locate him."

Ned went on with his work. Dick was very busy sending up the dirt and Ned and Edith washed it. As for the Unknown, he had disappeared, but no one was uneasy at his absence, for he was in the habit of going away without telling his friends beforehand that he intended to do so. Almost without cessation the work was carried on during the night, and with such success that when they were about to leave off for breakfast, Young Klondike calculated that they had not less than thirty thousand dollars' worth of gold.

Their successful labors gave them a good appetite for the excellent breakfast which Edith had prepared, and they were about to sit down and eat when Dick gave a great shout, pointing to the river as he did so.

"Look! look!" he cried. "There's the Unknown in a canoe!"

As Dick spoke the Unknown paddled towards the shore, ran his canoe close to the bank, and stepped ashore. Then, after dragging the canoe out of the water, he hurried up to his friends.

"Don't ever abuse me, Ned," he cried, as he climbed the bank, "for keeping you waiting. Here I am right on time as usual."

"You don't suppose we'd wait five minutes for you, Zed, do you?" asked Ned, laughingly. "Where have you been?"

"Yes, that's it," cried Dick. "What did you want to steal away in that fashion for?"

"Everything in order, Dick. That's my plan," answered the Unknown, sitting down with the others. "When I've eaten, I'll talk, not before."

So they had to restrain their curiosity until the detective's hunger was appeased, for not till then would he speak.

"First of all," said the Unknown, "what have you been doing?"

"Working all night."

"That's right, that's right, good boys, keep at it," observed the Unknown. "You've had luck, I see," he added, glancing at a pile of gold.

"About thirty thousand dollars' worth, Zed," said Young Klondike.

"A great night's work!" cried the Unknown. "All the more reason for what I was doing last night."

"Why don't you speak," said Dick, impatiently. "What's the use of making such a mystery of your proceedings?"

"Dear boy," said the Unknown, "I had a strong suspicion when our friend Perkins skipped that he was up to no good."

"What do you imagine he intended doing?" inquired Ned.

"It was my belief that he had gone away for a purpose," said the Unknown. "I determined to get on his trail if possible. I felt sure he had not gone back to Copper Centre, so I went up the river, hoping to fall in with him."

"And what happened?"

"Why, Ned, in the first place I fell against this canoe, stumbled over it in fact, hidden near the river."

"An Indian canoe!" cried Ned. "That means those fellows are still near."

"It's my opinion that this canoe belonged to Peters, and that he'd hidden it where I dropped across it," said the Unknown. "Well, I got into it and paddled on up stream."

"Did you see anything of Perkins?"

"Wait, wait, Ned, I'm coming to that. You're going to have the whole story if you'll have a little patience. While I was paddling in the middle of the stream some one hailed me. 'That you Bill?' he shouted."

"Bill!" exclaimed Ned. "What did he mean by that?"

"That's what puzzled me for a minute," continued the detective. "Then I got on to it. The man, whoever it was, took me for Copper Bill, the half-breed. I was just going to answer him, when the same voice spoke again: 'Say, Black Rabbit, are you there, my friend?' Instantly I shouted back: 'I'm not Black Rabbit, boss, I'm Copper Bill. You struck it right first time;' and, of course, I disguised my voice as well as I could."

"Go on," said Ned. "This is getting interesting."

"So I thought. I waited, but no answer came, and then I spoke again," said the Unknown. "But it was no use, the fellow shut up like a clam."

"What was his reason, Zed?" asked Dick.

"Oh! that wasn't hard to discover, Dick. He wasn't fooled by me. Guess he knew it wasn't Copper Bill speaking to him, and he got scared."

"Likely enough," said Ned. "A curious adventure, but I see nothing in it to concern us."

"Oh! you don't?" inquired the Unknown, sarcastically. "Nothing to concern us! Why, of course not. Great fun, isn't it?"

"Shut up! Talk sense if you can!" exclaimed Ned.

"Dear boy, nothing but words of wisdom have been falling from my mouth the last half hour," said the Unknown, "and the stream isn't exhausted yet. See here, Ned, I recognized the voice. I'll swear it was Job Perkins who shouted to me."

"That doesn't seem likely."

"I'll prove it," retorted the Unknown. "Black Rabbit, are you there, my friend? 'My friend.' Isn't that his way of speaking?"

"Yes, yes, Zed; you're right," said Ned. "Well, this shows that Perkins is acquainted with the Indians."

"There's no doubt of it," replied the detective. "And he means to bring them down on us."

Ned sprang up.

"We'll take your canoe and go up stream and look for the scoundrel. What do you think of that plan?" he asked.

"We can't do better," said Dick, "than to continue our Indian Raid."

"You bet we can't," assented the Unknown, "only before we go we'll hide the gold."

This was done, and the party started, Dick sitting in the bow paddling, the others keeping a good watch on both sides of the stream as they proceeded.

When they had gone more than a couple of miles, Edith called attention to the fact that they had not brought their rifles with them, and Ned wanted to go back for them, but the Unknown thought they would only have Perkins to deal with after all.

"We can manage him, Ned," he declared. "It's not as if we should run against Copper Bill and his gang."

So it was decided to go on, but when they had paddled a few miles further without seeing anything of Perkins, it really seemed as if they were only wasting time, and Ned was quite ready to return.

However, as the Unknown seemed reluctant to do this, Ned consented to wait awhile. But they came to a halt, going in close to the shore, beneath some projecting rocks which jutted out very abruptly, affording a very convenient shelter.

"If we see nothing of Perkins in half an hour," said the Unknown, "I'm willing to go right back to Cedar Gulch, but something tells me, Ned, that we haven't come here for nothing."

"We've come here for more than we wanted!" gasped Ned, in a smothered voice. "Listen!"

"Paddles! by the Jumping Jeremiah!" cried the Unknown. "Canoes coming down stream, as true as I live."

"We've only one chance for it, Dick!" exclaimed Ned. "If we stay here we're caught. There's no escape for us. Strike right out for those trees on the opposite bank. Once there we're safe."

Dick went to work vigorously with his paddle, and the canoe, like a flash, shot out into the stream.

Just as it did so, with Dick in the bow, steering it for the opposite bank, several canoes, filled with Indians, came into view. One of them darted forward after Young Klondike's party.

Instantly one of the Indians reached forward to grasp Edith who was in the stern of the canoe. The Unknown grasped her to hold her back, and Ned leaning over, struck at the Indian, who had seized Edith to beat him off.

"Keep on paddling, Dick! Keep on paddling!" cried the Unknown, holding on to Edith.

"Take your hands off that girl!" shouted Young Klondike, leaning over and beating Black Rabbit's outstretched arms to make him let go his hold.

"Drag her out of the boat!" shouted Copper Bill, who was in another canoe. "You have her now, Black Rabbit! Don't let her escape!"

Ned, furious with passion, was fighting hard with

Black Rabbit, and Dick was paddling with all his strength, the Unknown still holding Edith back.

Black Rabbit had reached so far forward that he was more than half out of his canoe, and when Ned struck him a violent blow he lost his balance and slipped over the side into the water. The Unknown prevented Edith from being dragged with him into the stream.

"Paddle! Paddle, Dick!" cried the Unknown. "We may get away yet."

"Impossible! They have rifles; we are unarmed," answered Ned, despondently. "We are at their mercy."

Some confusion had followed Black Rabbit's fall into the water, and all the canoes at once stopped. Those in the rear canoes, hearing the splash, thought that Edith had gone into the water, more especially as they could not see her. Taking Ned's advice, she had crouched down in the canoe to escape any shots that might be fired.

Meanwhile Black Rabbit had been dragged from the river, and Copper Bill was shouting to his gang to follow Young Klondike.

"No shooting!" he cried. "They can't escape us. See that they don't land."

The half-breed seemed certain of success, standing up in his canoe with a smile on his face, and when Ned looked around he waved his hand to him.

"Out of the canoe!" cried Ned, when the craft was a few yards from shore, "the water's shallow. Let us make a rush for it!"

Quickly Edith and the others sprang into the river and dashed through the water to the bank.

"They're escaping!" shouted the half-breed, "shoot them down!"

Just as a volley was fired, Young Klondike and his companions jumped amongst the trees, and though the bullets rattled around them, no one was hit. Up the bluff they went, running as fast as they could, the Indians following in hot pursuit. But Ned's party increased its lead, and were soon out of danger.

To get back to the camp did not take long, because it was not half as far across land, as it had been on the water.

"Your rifles!" cried Young Klondike. "We'll do the hunting now. With my gun in my hand, I don't trouble about those fellows."

They turned back to meet the Indians, and found that Copper Bill and his gang had beaten a hasty retreat.

Several shots were fired, but it was clear that it was only wasting powder and shot, the enemy being out of range.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah!" cried the Unknown. "Three days' fighting! Hot work, Ned. Ye gods and little fishes! How will it end?"

CHAPTER IX.

YOUNG KLONDIKE'S ATTACK ON THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

"THIS kind of thing can't go on," exclaimed Ned, as soon as they had returned to the camp.

"But how can it be stopped?" asked Dick.

"Well, it has to be stopped, that's what I have to say, and we must do something. We can't go on working these diggings when we're liable to be attacked at any moment. I want to get all the gold there is here, but we're paying too high a price for it."

"There's only one way to put an end to it," retorted Dick. "We must attack the Indians and not let up on them until they're beaten."

"Yes, but we don't all want to be killed," cried the Unknown, "and by gosh, those noble red men are just a bit too strong for us. We had a close call to-day, and it was a blame piece of good luck to get out as we did."

"There's no doubt they are too strong for us," answered Ned. "We might manage as we've done before to keep them away from here, but we mustn't think of attacking them."

"Why not get help?" asked Edith.

"Hooray!" cried Dick. "That's what we want. Let's go right away to Copper Centre, Ned, and try to get some men to join us."

"Guess that won't be easy," said the Unknown. "Men come to the Klondike to get gold, not bullets."

"I will pay them well," answered Young Klondike.

"Yes, Dick, you are right and so is Edith. We'll go straight away to Copper Centre and see what can be done."

"You'll have your trouble for nothing," observed the Unknown. "Copper Centre isn't peopled by fools."

As it was almost certain that the Indians would attack the camp that night, no one was unwilling to get away.

The preparations took a short time only. To reach the town was an easy matter, for, as will be remembered, Ned and his party had a dog sled with them. The dogs had been tied up now for several days, and as they had had a complete rest, and had been well fed in the meantime, there was no reason why the journey should be a long one.

The dogs fairly flew over the ground, and as the road was now familiar to Ned and his friends, the trip was made at a surprising rate, and almost without stopping. It was not late in the evening when the sled drew up outside Jim Casey's hotel.

Ned's return brought a lot of the curious around him, and he went straight to business, knowing that time was an object. It was not safe to leave the diggings at Cedar Gulch too long, because Perkins might get there and work the gold.

It proved a comparatively easy matter, as Ned had imagined, to procure help. He engaged six men to join him in his expedition. Some of them were actuated by motives of gain, for Ned promised very handsome pay, others by a spirit of adventure alone. At any rate they were all strong, hardy miners who were certain to render a good account of themselves in any brush they might have with the enemy.

Ned was delighted.

"You don't know everything, Zed," he said to the Unknown, "although you think you do. I told you I should get my men and I did."

"Have your laugh at me, dear boy," remarked the Unknown. "Laugh just as much as you please, but don't do me an injustice. I don't think I know everything, Ned, but I'm dead sure I know more than most people."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Ned. "Well, get ready, we're off right away."

"Off!" cried the Unknown. "Nonsense! Do you mean to tell me we're not going to pass the night in a hotel, now we have the chance."

"That's exactly what I tell you. However, if you like you can stay. Do what you please."

The Unknown walked away growling. A moment later he came back looking more satisfied.

"Can't go, dear boy," he said.

"How's that?" cried Dick.

"Dogs can't move. I've just had a look at them, and they'll be fit for nothing till they've had ten or twelve hours' rest."

"That doesn't make any difference," returned Ned; "we go, all the same."

"Tramp it?"

"No, canoes. I've arranged that. It's more convenient than sleds, so long as the river is not frozen over. Some of the men who are coming owned canoes, and I've bought two of them. We get right away. Edith, you'll be perfectly safe here till we return."

"Ned," said Edith, "I do wish you'd remember once for all, that where you and Dick and the Unknown go, I go too. Don't ever talk like that again."

So Edith went with the expedition, and a large portion of the population of Copper Centre was at the riverside when the two canoes started and the miners sent them off with a rousing cheer.

"The most difficult part is to come," said Dick. "We have to find the Indians."

"Boss, that's dead easy," said Bat Paine, one of the men Ned had engaged in the town. "Guess I can strike their village all right."

"Do you know this country?" asked Ned, glad to hear these words.

"Pretty well, Young Klondike. I've passed one of the villages of the Coppermine Indians often. It ain't far from the river, and I reckon that's the gang we're after."

"Have you ever been to Cedar Gulch?" inquired Ned.

"If it's that big clump of cedars 'bout thirty miles up river, I've passed it often."

"That's the place. How far had we better go past Cedar Gulch before we land?"

"We won't go up there at all," answered Paine. "Guess we'll land a mile or two this side. Then we can work our way up the valley, and it's not hard walking there. We shall be at the Indian village tomorrow sure."

"Say?" asked the Unknown. "Do you know this man Perkins?"

Paine stared hard at the detective.

"What are you giving me, boss?" he asked; "guess that's why I'm here. Indians are better dead, but, by gosh! I'm not going to get out of my way to shoot them. No, boss, it's that smooth talker Perkins I'm gunning for. He played it low down on us at Copper Centre and I'll get square with him."

"Shake!" cried the Unknown, grasping Paine's hand. "You and me agree, for I'm not in love with our Christian friend, either."

Ned had to ask for silence before long, because the sound of their voices might give the alarm to the enemy. A close watch was kept, and both sides of the river were scrutinized so far as the darkness would allow, but nothing was seen of a suspicious nature. When the time came for landing Ned would have liked to pay a visit to Cedar Gulch, having an idea that Perkins might be met with there, but as this meant a delay he decided to keep to the original plan.

The canoes were taken out of the water and carefully secreted, for they might be wanted again. Then the expedition got well under way, and very soon the nine men and Edith had left the river below them, and were striking inland, Bat Paine acting as their guide.

After some talk they split up into three parties. Ned, Paine and the Unknown were in front, Dick, Edith and two miners in the center, with two men bringing up the rear. This order was formed to guard against an ambush, the understanding being that on an alarm being given the three parties would at once concentrate into one body.

Ned began to have doubts at length as to whether they had struck the right trail, but Paine was positive he had not gone astray, and Young Klondike became more easy in his mind.

"I am dead sure, boss," said Paine, "that we're on the trail. See that cave?" pointing to a large hole in the rocks.

"What of it?"

"That's sure proof, Young Klondike. I've slept in there more than once."

"And how far off are we now?" inquired Ned.

"'Bout two miles," answered Paine; "not a yard more."

"We'll halt," said Ned.

Everybody came up and then Ned suggested that it would be well to have something to eat.

"We haven't much food with us," he said. "But I guess you're all mighty hungry, and it's poor work fighting on empty stomachs. Get some wood, there's plenty about, and we'll build a fire and boil some coffee."

"The fire will be seen," cried Dick.

"No, for we will make it in the cave."

The fire was soon lit, for wood was abundant, and the hasty meal much refreshed the party. Then they went on the march again.

Not a sound was heard now, no one even whispered, so necessary was it to be cautious. Young Klondike meant to surprise the village and make a thorough raid.

Nearer and nearer Ned's party went, until suddenly Paine grasped Young Klondike's arm, and without speaking pointed to a fire which was burning a short distance away.

"The Indian village?" inquired Ned, speaking as softly as possible.

"That fire is burning in front of one of the lodges. It's a soft snap we have," said Paine. "They don't suspect anything, 'cause they wouldn't show that blaze if they did."

"Besides there are no sentries," remarked the Unknown. "The whole place is asleep and we're going to have a picnic. It reminds me of something that happened to me when I was in a Bengal jungle——"

"Pshaw! give us a rest," cried Ned, impatiently.

"Crushed again," murmured the Unknown. "Dear boy, I am dumb, but I was in the Bengal jungle just the same."

Ned collected his small party and addressed them very quietly.

"My object is to terrify these Indians, gentlemen, not to kill them," he said. "Of course if any of them get shot if we have a fight that can't be helped, they don't deserve pity after the way they've acted. But I don't think there will be any fighting. We shall take them in their sleep. The surprise will be complete and they will surrender. In any event, mind, don't shoot the squaws."

"Is that all?" inquired one man.

"Yes, except that I'm going to tell you how the attack is to be made," said Ned. "You will follow me down this slope, and when I give the word charge forward. Go right ahead, mind, and stop for nothing!"

"This is bad luck," growled one of the men, who had joined the party for the sake of adventure merely. "Boss, I came for fighting, and thunder! there ain't no going to be any, it seems."

"Well, I'll have to double your pay to make up for the disappointment. No more talk. Have your rifles ready and follow me. No sentry," he added.

"True enough, they suspect nothing."

"Whoop! Whoop!"

All at once, in quick succession, came two shouts, the volume of which seemed to be increased by the dead silence which they disturbed. Strange to say, the noise came from the rear of Young Klondike's party.

"Forward!" cried Ned, in ringing tones. "That shout has alarmed the camp. Quickness only can help us now."

All was commotion in the village. Men were rushing out of the lodges and squaws were shrieking. The bucks seized their arms, and collecting around the tent of Copper Bill prepared to defend themselves.

Ned's party poured in a volley, and instantly this

was replied to by rifle shots and a shower of arrows.

"I'm hit!" cried one of Young Klondike's men.

"A bullet?" asked another, turning to his wounded comrade.

"A blame arrow!" gasped the man. "You go on shooting, pard. I'll be gunning myself in a minute."

Very bravely, spite of the intense pain it caused, the wounded man tore the barbed weapon from the wound, which bled profusely.

Edith, regardless of the bullets and arrows that were flying, insisted on attending to the wound, and very cheerfully she fastened a bandage around the man's left arm, which was the member that had been hurt.

"Guess that evens up things," cried the man, blazing away at the Indians. "I saw a buck fall, anyway. Great sport, by gosh!"

"Not what I wanted!" exclaimed Young Klondike. "We're making no progress. If we advance we shall be shot down, for those fellows are about twice as many as I expected to see. Keep behind these bowlers, boys, and fire away."

The miners wanted no orders to fire. They were delighted to find themselves at close quarters with the enemy. Paine was not doing so much shooting as the others. He stopped from time to time and took a long, steady look into the crowd of Indians, who were now only faintly visible because the fire was almost extinguished.

"I'm scouting for friend Perkins," he explained, as a reason for his conduct.

Most of Young Klondike's party were so utterly careless that it never entered their heads that they were in the slightest danger. But Ned knew better, and so did the Unknown, and the two had a short talk.

"Give me your advice, Ned," said Ned.

"I think we ought to retreat."

"Retreat! Say, that's a back down entirely. My idea was that we might stand our ground here, Ned. Of course, an advance is out of the question at present. You must have some reason for advising a retreat."

"Yes, and a good one," answered the detective.

"We're in a trap. Instead of surprising the Indians, they surprised us, Ned. I believe we were shadowed from the time we left the river."

"By whom?"

"That same old party, Perkins."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all, very probable," persisted the Unknown. "The cry that alarmed the Indian camp came from our rear, and it wasn't our Indian cry, either. It was Perkins, I'm dead sure, who gave the alarm. Retreat, Ned, retreat, while there's time, or we shall have the enemy behind us cutting off the path."

"Ned! Ned!" cried Dick, rushing back, "we must skip. Those redskins are climbing that bluff to the right to get behind us."

"Great Heaven! it's so!" shouted Ned. "We must fly or we are lost!"

CHAPTER X.

JOB PERKINS ACTS THE PART OF PEACEMAKER.

THE fourth day's fighting was over, and it seemed that the struggle on the fifth, which was about to begin, would end in the total defeat of Young Klondike's party.

The Indians were very active now, and were making no secret of what they were doing, feeling confident, apparently, that they had the white men safely trapped. The voices of the chiefs could be plainly heard giving orders. Copper Bill and Black Rabbit were particularly active, and the half-breed shouted defiantly to Young Klondike from time to time.

"Why do you run away, Young Klondike?" asked the half-breed. "Say, you can't be afraid?"

Dick turned and blazed away in the direction from which the sounds came, for he was furious. He would have stayed if Ned had not called to him to desist.

"You are only wasting bullets, Dick," cried Ned. "Keep them, they will be more useful later on."

"We're hemmed in," said the Unknown, in anxious tones. "Our retreat is cut off."

"Are you sure, Zed?"

"Listen," said the Unknown, calling on the crowd to halt. "What do you hear in the path below?"

"Voices!" cried Paine. "Indian bucks talking, true as I live."

"That's sure proof!" exclaimed the Unknown.

"I'm sorry I led you into this!" cried Ned, impulsively, turning to the six men he had brought from Copper Centre.

"Don't you shed tears over us, boss," said one of the men. "Guess we'll come through all right yet, and if we don't who's to blame you, Young Klondike? It's not as if you weren't taking the same chances as ourselves."

"That's the talk!" cried several of the men.

"We're with you to the end, boss!" cried the first speaker, and the others expressed their agreement with him.

Ned and the Unknown were trying their utmost to find a place where a successful stand might be made, and when they reached some bowlders it was decided to halt. If they advanced they might find no protection.

Copper Bill had left his village, and he and his bucks were following up Young Klondike's party as they retreated.

Ned and his friends were busily engaged in piling great rocks one on top of the other, so that a kind of fort might be formed, and soon they saw that they were able to construct more reliable defensive works than they had imagined was possible.

"I believe we could hold out a week here," cried Dick, delighted at the change that had come over their prospects.

"Yes, but our stomachs couldn't, dear boy," an-

swered the Unknown. "We have no food with us."

"Friends, dear friends," said a voice from above at this point.

The Unknown almost dropped with amazement. But Paine put his rifle to his shoulder, and the others glanced upwards in the darkness.

"Perkins himself!" gasped the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, what's going to happen now?"

"Better speak to him, Ned," said Dick. "See what he wants anyway."

"Is my dear friend, Young Klondike, below?" asked Perkins, in his softest tones. "The darkness of the night prevents me from seeing those familiar features."

"I'm going to have a word with him, Zed," said Young Klondike, quietly. "But keep a good watch. I don't trust the scoundrel."

"He won't spring any fresh trap on us," growled Paine.

"What do you want with me, Perkins?" cried Ned, angrily. "Be quick, and speak as briefly as you can. The less I have to do with you the better I'm pleased."

"Ingratitude! ingratitude!" whined Perkins. "It is the way of the world. I must bear it meekly, though."

"What's your game, boss?" cried one of the miners, impatient at this sort of talk.

"My mission is peace, beautiful peace," answered Perkins. "How happy it makes me to come between two bands of angry men who should be brothers and quell their savage strife."

"Perkins," said Ned, "this kind of talk doesn't impose on me a cent. Drop all this nonsense and tell me what you want. Guess you have some proposal to make. Out with it right now."

"My dear young friend you are on the right path. I have a proposal to make. I want no more shooting. No more killing. You can cause it all to cease if you will."

"Once more I tell you I'm waiting for you to tell me how!" cried Ned, furiously.

"There are two claims at Cedar Gulch," Perkins proceeded to say. "Give me yours in exchange for mine—"

"What! You want to sell us a gold brick?" shouted the Unknown. "Ye gods and little fishes! Your claim's petered out. I had a good look and know it."

"Our eccentric friend interrupted the conversation. I pardon him," replied Perkins. "I will resume. Exchange claims with me, and I will undertake that the Indians shall go right back to their village, and let you retreat in peace. Not a hand shall be raised against you."

"But why should I give you my claim?" asked Ned. "I prospected and found the gold, and it's mine."

"Pause, my dear young friend. Think how much

more good the gold will do to humanity in my hands than in yours."

"Do your worst!" shouted Young Klondike. "I make no terms with you, you hypocritical scoundrel. I defy you."

"My anger shall fall on you, rash youth. I will smite you and all with you with the edge of the sword!"

The instant Perkins had finished this speech he gave vent to a long and shrill whistle. Evidently it was a prearranged signal, for instantly a furious attack began.

On one side a band of Indians under Copper Bill rushed at the hastily constructed fort behind which Ned and his party were sheltered. At the same time Black Rabbit led another crowd of Indians, and both parties came rushing up, swinging their clubs and yelling fiercely.

Ned and his party fired as rapidly as they were able, and though many bucks fell wounded, the rest came on, and reaching the fort, they tried to force their way over the boulders. It was a hand to hand fight now, in which rifles became almost useless, except to be used as clubs.

Copper Bill kept in the background as usual, but Black Rabbit, who seemed not to know what fear was, rushed at the rocks, and uttering a savage cry, leaped on to a high boulder, and swung his club furiously at Ned.

The boy saw his danger, and quick as lightning he jumped aside, and then before Black Rabbit could recover himself to deal another blow, Ned caught hold of him by the ankles and sent him backwards. The Indian lay where he fell, as still as death.

"Avenge him!" cried Copper Bill, savagely. "Kill Young Klondike!"

"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted the bucks, as they fought desperately.

"No, you don't," said the Unknown, as he put up his rifle and warded off a blow that was aimed at him. "Indian bad man! Indian get it in the neck!"

With this remark the Unknown's rifle butt fell on the back of the Indian, almost breaking his spine. The man sank in a heap, groaning fearfully.

Many of the miners were using their six-shooters with great effect, and when a bullet grazed Copper Bill's cheek, drawing blood as it passed, the half-breed shouted to his bucks, and instantly they gave up the fight.

"Beaten!" shouted Young Klondike, triumphantly.

"The fight hasn't begun yet," cried Copper Bill. "You'll see who's beaten when I'm through with you."

Dick fired twice at the half-breed and each time he missed him, and before he could send another bullet at him, Copper Bill's figure was lost in the darkness.

"I think we got the best of that," said Ned, laughingly. "What that half-breed fellow said amounts

to nothing. He's beaten and he knows it. That last remark of his was all bluff."

"We can hold this place easily enough," said the Unknown. "We've shown that."

"And here we will stay. When daylight comes," answered Young Klondike, "we shall know better how to act."

"Wonder where that blame cuss Perkins is?" asked Bat Paine. "He's back of the whole game, but he's bitten off more than he can chew this time. Gosh! but I want to meet that man Perkins!" shouted Paine. "Where in thunder are you anyway?"

"Why don't you ask him to stand on the bluff and let you have a shot at him," laughed Dick. "He's sure to answer you."

"Because it's a correct thing to do," said a voice, and they knew it was Perkins again, and also that he was near, for he must have heard what was said, his speech being an answer to Dick's remark.

That Perkins was directly overhead this sound showed, but he could not be seen.

In a few minutes strange sounds were heard, and the Unknown was the first to guess what they meant.

"You hear that noise?" he gasped.

"Of course," answered Ned.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, it sends the cold shivers through me. That's Perkins at work."

"What's he doing?" asked Dick.

"He's trying to topple this great mass of earth and rock that's overhead onto us and bury us."

"He can't do it!" shouted Ned; "the ground is frozen too hard."

"The power of rendrock is great, my dear young friend," said Perkins, softly. "It will scatter you and your evil companions like chaff."

All his hearers looked at each other aghast. In such a situation the bravest man need not feel ashamed to show fear, for it seemed as if certain death stared them in the face.

"Can't we climb up there and chase him away?" cried Dick.

"Impossible! A cat couldn't climb this rock," answered Ned.

"But we needn't stay here and be crushed," said Edith. "We can move away before he explodes the rendrock—can't we, Ned?"

"What good will that do, Edith?" said Young Klondike. "Once out in the open we shall stand a poor show against the enemy. Still, we will do that if it's necessary. Better to die fighting than to be buried alive."

"This reminds me——" began the Unknown.

"Get off!" cried Dick.

"That's the last straw," exclaimed Ned. "We haven't trouble enough already, but the Unknown must rake up some of his reminiscences. It's snowing!" he added, abruptly.

"Wish it would blow a blizzard," said Paine.

"Thunder! I believe it will, only if it's going to do any good it must come on quick."

It was frightfully cold now, though the bowlders gave some little protection from the icy blast that was extremely penetrating. The man who had been wounded in the arm, was lying down behind the rocks wrapped in some blankets, the others still stood on guard, ready to resist an attack.

As Paine had predicted, the blizzard was on them now. Snow fell in a blinding sheet, and the force of the gale was terrific, and every moment the wind increased in strength.

Overhead the dull sound of the drill could be heard, showing that Perkins was still at work driving a hole in the rock so that he might put in the rendrock.

"He'll have to thaw the cartridges first," said the Unknown, "and that's going to take some time. There's no lighting a fire this weather."

Huddled up in a heap they all stood, crouching down behind the bowlders, with nothing to do but to listen to Perkins at his work.

All at once it stopped.

"He's ready to fire the hole!" cried Dick.

"Nonsense!" answered Ned. "He must thaw the cartridges. Guess he's gone away to do it."

"He's there!" cried the Unknown. "I can hear him talking to himself, and he's in a bit of a temper, too."

"He's here!" shouted Paine, excitedly, springing to his feet from behind the bowlder, as a dark form toppled off the rock overhead, and passed in front of Young Klondike's party.

Quick as a cat Ned sprang over the rocks, for he realized in a moment what had happened. The terrible force of the blizzard had swept Perkins right off the bluff. Ned rushed towards the spot where he had seen Perkins fall, with Bat Paine and the Unknown both following him.

Perkins was entirely unhurt. The snow that had just come down was not yet frozen hard, and this saved his fall. So, as soon as Ned came near him he was able to jump up and run away, making off towards the Indian village, because it was towards that place he had been thrown.

Ned could not fire at him, for he had left his rifle behind the rocks when he rushed out to capture Perkins, and so the scoundrel escaped.

"We must brave the storm," said Ned. "Let us push ahead, if possible, while the blizzard blows. Our path is sure to be clear now, for the Indians will not stay to face the gale. The further we can get away from here before daylight the better for us. Come along, everybody, while we have the chance."

It seemed as if the wind would sweep them over into the abyss, but still no one hesitated to follow Young Klondike's lead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FEARFUL EXPLOSION IN THE MOUNTAINS.

"SAY, I've had enough of this!" cried one of the miners, after struggling a few yards.

"Guess we all have!" exclaimed the Unknown. "You can have too much of a good thing, and I don't care who has my share of the blizzard."

The party had come to a standstill. Ned and Edith, who were in front, had halted, not because they did not wish to proceed, but because the fury of the elements was so great that they were unable to do so. The wind was right in their teeth, blowing the blinding snow against them and so cold that it cut like a knife.

"It's madness to attempt to go on, that's sure, boys," said Ned. "We must turn back. There's no help for it."

Going back was easier. The wind blew them along now, and in a few minutes they were in the fort again.

"A worse night I never remember," cried Bat Paine, "and by gosh, this poor fellow here is in bad shape."

He alluded to the man who had been wounded.

"The Unknown to the rescue!" exclaimed the detective, producing his flask. "Try a drop of this, my friend, it works wonders."

It really seemed as if the Unknown had spoken truly, for the wounded man revived considerably after he had taken a drink. His friends covered him up as well as they could, and they also shielded themselves from the storm by wrapping themselves in their heavy mission blankets.

"Anyway, we can rest here," said one man, "without thinking the blame rock's coming down on our heads."

"Yes, that's something," said Dick. "The blizzard has done some good for certain. That fellow Perkins is a regular demon. He must be, to think of smashing all of us to pieces."

At this moment the Unknown started up from behind the rocks, and in an instant he sprang over them, and was looking up at the bluff shore.

"Trying to see if there's going to be a change in the weather, Zed?" asked Ned.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, no!" shouted the Unknown. "Ye gods and little fishes! I think we're all dead men. Run, boys, run!" exclaimed the detective. "There's just a chance for life!"

At first some of the men thought the Unknown was joking, but his voice was so serious before he concluded that his words terrified all who heard them. Still, they lost no time in following his advice, and springing over the rocks, they dashed down the path, bending low, to avert the force of the wind.

"Keep under the rocks!" cried the Unknown frantically. "Do like me!"

Saying this he threw himself down on the path close to the rocks, and wondering more and more, the others did the same.

Instantly there was a noise like thunder, followed by a terrific crash, caused by the falling of great masses of stone and earth. Fragments of rock flew in all directions, and several of the party had very narrow escapes. Certainly some of them would have

been killed if they had not followed the Unknown's advice.

"Thus the wicked perish!" cried the familiar voice of Perkins, as soon as all was still.

"Not yet, boss!" shouted Paine, springing up, "but they're going to!"

And instantly he blazed away with his rifle in the direction where he imagined Perkins to be, and the Unknown and several others followed his example, hoping to finish him.

"Kill! Kill!" shouted a fierce voice, and instantly this order was followed by a wild yell as a band of Indian bucks charged up the bluff with Copper Bill in the lead.

"We must fly!" cried Dick.

"Not on your life!" shouted Ned. "We'll stand our ground and give them a volley. We're not hemmed in now, for the men on the other side have gone. Blaze away, boys!"

Everybody fired, Edith included. The wounded man, too, sat up and used his rifle on the enemy. It was a reception the Indians had not anticipated, for they probably thought that some of the party had perished when the rock fell.

The hot firing checked their advance instantly, and after another halt they received such a storm of bullets that they retreated in confusion.

"Now, let us move, if you like," said Ned. "I think we've had a bit the best of this last fight, and I only hope Perkins is amongst the victims. Zed, you saved our lives, there's no denying that."

"I was keeping my ears open," answered the Unknown. "The wind had fallen just a bit, and I felt sure that fellow Perkins would come back if he could reach the rock. I heard him overhead. I knew at once what had happened. He'd thawed out the cartridges and was going to blow us up. A close call, boys, but we came out on top just the same."

The wind was lessening in force every instant now. The snow had ceased to fall, and though it was still very cold, the air had lost the intense keenness that had hitherto been its chief characteristic. Rapid progress was made, the wounded man being carried along by his comrades, who shared the labor by turns.

Daylight came, and when they could look around they found themselves within a very short distance of the place where they had left their canoes. These had not been disturbed, and getting aboard them, they paddled away up the river towards Cedar Gulch, which they soon reached.

"Looks just as we left it!" said Dick, referring to their camp.

"Hope it will prove so," responded Ned, anxiously, jumping out of the canoe, and running up the bank. "Yes!" he cried, after a quick survey. "Everything is here, which is more than I expected. What shall we do?"

"That's easy, dear boy," said the Unknown. "Light a blazing fire and warm ourselves, and have something to eat."

The Unknown's advice was received with a shout of approval, and immediately the men set to work collecting wood, of which there was a large quantity near at hand, and a blazing fire was very soon warming the party and cooking their breakfast at the same time. The hot coffee produced a wonderful effect on the half-frozen group, and the wounded man declared he was quite well again.

But this Edith would not allow. She had constituted herself his nurse, and told him he must remain quiet; against this the man protested.

"You have your orders," said the Unknown, laughingly. "Kicking's no good. What Edith says goes."

"Now to get to work!" cried Ned. "We've lost enough time as it is, following those Indians. We'll see if we can't make up for it."

The miners who had come from Copper Centre with Ned had been astounded to see signs of diggings at Cedar Gulch, for no news of this had reached the city. They were still more astounded when Ned spoke of getting to work, looking upon it as a waste of time.

"Work here!" cried Bat Paine. "Not much, boss. It's not good enough for us. Oh, no!"

"I'll pay you well," replied Ned.

"Guess you will. There's no doubt about that, boss. Young Klondike's word is sufficient for that."

"Then what do you mean?" asked Ned, somewhat surprised. "It can't be because you don't like work. You don't seem that kind of men."

"You bet we're not. But see here, boss! It's robbery taking your money for nothing. What's the good of shoveling up that stuff?" said Paine, pointing to a great heap of dirt which had passed through the cradle.

"My friend," said the Unknown, producing a large bag, "you'll oblige me by taking a look at this."

"Gold!" cried Paine, astounded at what he saw.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars' worth," the Unknown said. "Got from here in one night."

"And only a small part of what is still waiting in the ground for us," exclaimed Ned. "Now, then, let me have an answer."

"What a strike!" cried one.

"A bonanza!" shouted another.

"Boss, I understand Perkins now," said Paine. "This strike of yours set him crazy. By gosh! I don't wonder, either. It's wonderful!"

The men went to work with a will now, having arranged terms with Ned, who as usual showed himself extremely liberal in his treatment of them. Of course the ground had to be thawed again, but this was a small matter with wood so plentiful.

The Unknown, instead of assisting in these operations, paced to and fro on some rising ground, from which some considerable view was obtainable.

"Keeping yourself warm, Zed?" cried Dick.

"Dear boy, I'm at work."

"Work! Ha! Ha!" laughed Ned. "Mighty

hard work, too. Don't overdo it, Zed. Be careful, we can't afford to lose you."

"I'm a sentry," cried the Unknown. "I'm watching for the Indians. Don't forget they may return at any moment. If they swooped down suddenly while you were all in the diggings we should be in a tight corner."

"Well, keep on watching, Zed. It don't hurt us and it amuses you. You bet we shall never see anything more of the Indians or Perkins either."

"Betting's sinful, Ned, as our absent friend Perkins would say," replied the Unknown, "or I'd wager you my share in this gold here against yours that we shall have more trouble with Perkins before many days are over."

"He'll have to be quick, then," answered Ned. "It won't take long working this gold out, for it's easy to get and then I propose to clear out."

With that Ned went back to the diggings, leaving the Unknown to continue his solitary walk.

As soon as the ground was thawed out digging commenced, and with so many men to help rapid progress was made. Two shafts had been sunk, and there was an abundance of water at hand, so it was an easy matter to wash the gold.

The strike continued to surprise everybody. The richness of the vein was a revelation to Paine and his friends, who had never seen anything like it before. When they heard the history of the affair, how Perkins had given it up to Young Klondike, believing it worthless, they laughed till they were tired.

"For once he got left!" cried Paine, "and so the gold in his claim over there has petered out."

"Not a nugget left," replied the Unknown. "I had a good look after he left it. Besides, his leaving it is sure proof he knows it is worthless."

"That's not the reason," cried Dick. "It's because he despises gold."

"Ha, ha!" laughed everybody.

Young Klondike determined that an entire rest should be taken that night. The proceedings of the past few days had been extremely exhausting, and everyone stood in need of rest. As a matter of precaution one man was left on guard, and he did his duty as sentry until relieved. The man who succeeded him failed to do so, going fast asleep at his post.

The Unknown was the first to open his eyes the next morning.

When Ned awoke soon after, he saw the detective staring with wide open eyes as if he had seen a ghost.

"Got the nightmare, Zed?" he cried, laughingly.

"Don't you hear?" asked the Unknown, quickly.

"Certainly. I can hear some one at work, and I'm glad, too, for it shows our men don't have to be told. They get down to it without orders."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, you're right!" shouted the Unknown. "That blame cuss'll have to get an order not to work, and I'm going to give it, too!"

The Unknown grasped his rifle and rose with a very fierce look on his face.

"I'll finish him, Ned," he said.

"What! Kill our men!" cried Ned, who thought the Unknown was crazy.

"No, no. Don't you know where that work is going on? Look! It's over there in Perkins' claim."

"By gracious!" cried Ned, quite excited now. "He can't have had the nerve to show himself here again. Yet it looks like it. Why, there he is!"

At this moment Job Perkins came up out of the shaft, and turning around he faced Ned and the Unknown, waved his arm to them, and smiled as if he was delighted to see them once more. Then, with perfect unconcern, he threw the bucket of dirt he was carrying into the cradle, and proceeded to work it.

"He must have come back in the night!" cried Dick, who was awake now.

"No doubt, but as our sentry didn't hear him," replied Ned, "our sentry must have been asleep."

Young Klondike's camp was wildly excited now. Bat Paine had his hand on his rifle and was eying Perkins in a very significant manner, and the rest of the men from Copper Centre were discussing the affair in an animated fashion.

"Well, it has to be done," said the Unknown to Ned. "So I suppose I'd better take the matter in hand."

"Take what in hand?"

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! I'm going to shoot this man Perkins right away!"

"You'll do no such thing!" cried Ned. "I can't have the fellow, bad as he is, shot down in cold blood. Why, what's he going to do now?"

As Ned spoke, Job Perkins left his claim, and walked slowly over to that of Young Klondike.

CHAPTER XII.

COPPER BILL MAKES HIS LAST THROW.

"MAY peace and prosperity be with you!" said Perkins, as he drew near, and he raised his broad-brimmed hat as he spoke.

His hearers were so astounded by his assurance that they could only stare at him in silence, and he came right up to them without a word being said.

Then Paine, the Unknown, and some of the others recovering themselves, sprang to their feet with angry exclamations.

Perkins, still smiling, raised his hand as if to still this commotion, apparently not scared by the fierce looks of the miners.

"This is no occasion for strife, dear friends," he said, soothingly. "My mission is one of peace."

"Thunder! what do you expect?" demanded Paine.

"A warm greeting," replied Perkins, "the pressure of a glad hand, the sound of rejoicing, the feast prepared to welcome the prodigal's return. Brethren, I have sinned, but I repent. Receive me in your fold again."

"This won't do at all," said Ned, in a decided tone. "You're a scoundrel and a hypocrite. You tried

to kill us, you set the Indians on us, and it's only through a miracle we escaped."

"But I have repented, dear friends."

"Bosh!" shouted Dick.

"Lynch him!" cried Paine, fiercely.

"There's lots of trees about," exclaimed another miner. "Let's string him up to one of them. The sooner his kind are dead the better."

"Dear boy," said the Unknown, "our friend Perkins is delaying the work of the day, which I'm sure must embarrass him. Here is the rope. Let us perform the ceremony right now."

"Oh! the hardness of heart of these cruel men," groaned Perkins, casting up his eyes.

"Stop that lingo!" cried Ned, angrily, "or I'll keep my hands off, and leave you to your fate. That talk disgusts me, so don't let me have any more of it."

"String him up," said Paine, "that'll close his jaw."

"No, I won't have it," declared Ned.

"Won't have it, dear boy?" asked the Unknown with a look of astonishment. "Do I understand that you object to the hanging?"

"Certainly, I do, Zed," answered Ned. "You ought to know that. You know very well I have set my face against lynching always when there's any other course open. The man's a scoundrel and does not deserve to live, but I'm not going to rob him of his worthless life."

"Then what's to be done with him?" inquired the Unknown.

"Run him out of the camp," answered Ned. "Get rid of him. What do you say, Dick?"

"I agree with you, Ned. Run him out, I say, and give him notice that if he shows up again he'll be shot on sight."

"I won't dispute the point," said the Unknown. "What you say goes."

Paine and the others had a high opinion of Young Klondike, so they fell in with his wishes, somewhat reluctantly it must be owned.

"You've had a narrow escape," said Young Klondike to Perkins. "Let this be a warning to you. Now go."

"It would be more merciful to kill me at once," said Perkins, pointing to his wretched clothing, which was a poor protection against the cold. "I shall die before I can reach civilization."

"That's not my affair," cried Ned. He was disgusted with the man, and wanted to be rid of him.

"Ned, Ned," said Edith, quickly, but in a low tone, "that's not like you. The man's on the verge of starvation, and how he's managed to live with those threadbare clothes and those old shoes, passes my comprehension. As he says, if he's driven out of the camp it's death."

"But what can I do, Edith?"

"Why, Ned, keep him here."

"Here?"

"Certainly, Ned, and make him work. Feed him,

but don't pay him a cent, and keep him hard at it. That's having a good revenge on him, and when we're through with the gold here we'll leave him behind, with a little food, to shift for himself."

"Edith, you've the best head of all. I'll do it!" cried Ned. "Perkins," he added, "Miss Welton has pleaded for you, and you owe your life to her. You will stay in this camp and work for us. Your food you will receive, but not one cent of pay. If I see you shirk your work, I shall have you run right out of camp that instant. Now, skip and get right down to work at once."

Perkins never even thanked Ned for saving his life. Perhaps he did not think he was out of danger yet, for Paine and some of the others were anything but pleased at the prospect of being associated with the fellow. They took good care to throw the hardest work upon him, and he was not allowed any rest except for his meals, and they even hurried him over these.

"Brother Paine," he said, extending his hand, "let bygones be bygones."

"Speak to me again and I'll blow your brains out!" answered Paine, angrily, and as he looked as if he meant what he said, Perkins was silent.

"That's the way to talk, Bat," said one of Paine's comrades. "Wish he was dead, anyway."

"Don't you worry yourself 'bout him, pard," answered Paine, with a grim look on his face. "If he gets to Copper Centre alive I'll give him my pile."

"Are you going to lay him out?"

"That's what I am. So long as the work's on I'm in Young Klondike's employ, and I guess I don't want to rile him, for he's a white man. Soon's it's over, though, things is different. I go where I like and do what I please. Then Job had better look out."

So the prospects of Perkins ornamenting society much longer were very dubious.

For nearly a week the work proceeded without intermission, except for sleep, and with such good results that nearly one hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold was obtained, so all were in great spirits, as a matter of course.

Then one morning it was discovered that Job Perkins was missing.

"What does that mean?" cried Dick. "Guess he's saved up his food and has struck right out for Copper Centre—got tired of work."

"You bet," said Paine. "Job was never very fond of that. The cuss! I meant to shoot him. Blame him, I won't find him very easily now."

"Well, it's a good riddance," said Ned. "I hated the sight of the fellow."

"And yet you'll have to see him again, Ned," observed the Unknown. "Dear boy, I was quite right before, and I'm sure I'm going to be right again. Perkins has not gone to Copper Centre. He's gone right away to join the Indians and bring Copper Bill, Black Rabbit and the whole gang down on us again."

"You see an Indian in everything, Zed," laughed

Young Klondike. "Wait till they come; they'll have a warm reception, for we're stronger than we were the last time they were here."

"Still, Ned," said Dick, "it's mighty serious. Perkins knows how much gold we have, and if the Indians come here they may do so in overwhelming numbers."

"Pshaw! he's not gone near the Indians," answered Ned. "Forget him, and start to work again."

Towards noon the Unknown returned to the camp from which he had been absent for some hours, and naturally everyone wanted to know what he had been doing.

"I have been finding out what's become of Perkins," answered the detective. "And, Ned, I've discovered, beyond a doubt, that he's gone up the Copper river, not down. That shows he's not gone to Copper Centre."

"What proof have you?" inquired Ned.

"I got on to his trail and followed it right up the river, so there's no mistake."

Ned did not dispute the matter further, for he knew that the Unknown was very careful in all matters of this kind, and that his conclusions were usually correct.

"Still, Ned, I doubt whether we shall see anything of the Indians," said Ned. "We gave them such a bad time when we last met them, that I don't believe even Perkins will be able to persuade them to attack us again. There's no cause for alarm."

"We shan't be here much longer anyway," said Paine.

"True," cried Ned, quickly. "The gold's at an end or nearly so, according to all appearances."

This last statement received confirmation in the course of the next hour or two, for not ten dollars' worth of gold was found out of all the buckets of dirt that were washed.

Dick suggested that they break up camp at once and get back to the town.

"We've done very well, Ned," he said. "We've struck it rich. Let's get back with our gold and bank it somewhere. Besides, the river will soon be frozen over, and as we have no dog sled now, we shall have to tramp."

"Yes, that's serious. I saw signs of the river freezing," said Ned. "You're quite right, Dick, the sooner we go the better. Put the gold on board the big canoe and we'll start right away."

"Hurrah!" cried the Unknown. "That's the most sensible decision you've come to, Ned, for I don't know how long. It reminds me of what I did when the river froze on us in Siberia in '88. We wanted to get through, so——"

"You looked at it," cried Dick, "and thawed it with the fire of your eyes."

They all laughed loudly at the Unknown, who walked hastily away as if he was offended. Of course he was not, for he never minded a joke, even when it was at his own expense, and he was soon as busy as the

others in helping to load the canoes, and just as it was getting dark the start from Cedar Gulch took place.

The current carried the canoes along splendidly, and there seemed not the slightest doubt that they would reach the town by the early morning. As they went on, however, the stream ceased to flow so swiftly, and then they discovered that its surface was coated with ice. The paddles crashed through it, first of all easily enough, then later with much difficulty.

"The ice gets thicker every minute," cried Edith.

"Shows how fast things freeze up here," answered Dick.

"Doesn't show anything of the kind," said Ned. "It simply means that we're getting every moment into stiller water. Hello! Listen! We're not the only people on the river. I can hear voices."

"Indians!" cried the Unknown.

"Bosh! they're talking English. Hello there!" shouted Ned. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm the claim recorder at Copper Centre, just trying to get up the river with a few friends. Who may you be?"

"Ned Golden."

"Young Klondike!" exclaimed the other man. "Glad to meet you. We're stuck on the ice. Looks as if our boat would be nipped in it."

"It's thinner over here. Work your way over if you can," cried Young Klondike. "They're coming along, boys, hark, they're getting nearer every minute."

"Yes, but what about ourselves," asked Edith. "We shall be nipped, too, Ned."

"Good advice you gave me, Young Klondike," exclaimed the claim recorder, as his boat came up.

"Yes, I was able to advise you," laughed Ned, "but who's going to advise me. We're stuck right here, and can't get along. The ice is closing in on us."

"Ugh! Ugh! White man die!"

These shouts astounded everybody, for the presence of the Indians had not been suspected until their cries were heard. That they were in great numbers was evident from the noise they made, as they ran alongside the river yelling furiously.

"Get to work with axes!" shouted Ned, standing up in his canoe. "The water ahead is not frozen. We must cut our way to it!"

"My dear Indian friends," called a voice, "kill in the most merciful way, therefore kill quickly."

"I know that voice," cried the claim recorder, excitedly. "There's only one man talks like that. His name's Perkins, and he's a blame fraud."

"That's the man," said the Unknown.

"He's the worst scoundrel in Alaska. A tough, a claim jumper, and all that's bad."

"He tried to jump my claim at Cedar Gulch," said Young Klondike. "Said he owned it before Chris Peters did."

"Showing his papers!" cried a voice. "Don't forget that, Young Klondike," and Perkins now ap-

peared, struggling across the ice towards the canoes with the Indians.

"The papers are forgeries," retorted the claim recorder. "Peters owned the claim, and if you had the ground from him, Young Klondike, your title's complete."

Ned was not paying much attention to this talk, however, for he was very busily engaged in breaking through the ice with an ax. Dick and the Unknown were doing the same, and some of the others were firing at the Indians in order to check their advance.

"Better work at the ice," said Ned. "Those fellows are in such numbers that they can do what they like. Our only chance is to get clear water and give them the slip."

So everybody went to work, either with an ax or some other implement, and steady progress was made, a channel being cut, along which the canoes proceeded.

The voices of Copper Bill and Black Rabbit were heard encouraging the men to proceed, for it seemed as if they were reluctant to do so, evidently having doubts as to the solidity of the ice. Still, they came on, gaining on Young Klondike and his friends, and it was not long before they were within a short distance of the canoes.

"Ten yards further," cried Ned, "and we are in clear water."

"Look!" exclaimed Edith.

She pointed to the Indians, who were now within twenty yards of the canoes. Thirty bucks were drawn up in a line on the ice, each man having a rifle at his shoulder, with the muzzle aimed at the canoes.

Copper Bill and Black Rabbit stood at one end of the line, Job Perkins at the other.

"The blame cuss has beaten us!" cried the Unknown.

"My friends, I have suffered at your hands," said Perkins, "but I forgive you all."

"Fire!" shouted Copper Bill.

Crash!

No report followed the command of the half-breed, for the reason that before the word was out of his mouth the ice on which he and his bucks were standing gave way, and everyone, Perkins included, was thrown into the water.

Ned and his friends, thankful for their providential escape from death, cut through the ice, and getting into clear water, they resumed their journey down the river.

When the Indians and Perkins were last seen they were in the icy water, struggling hard to reach the bank.

Young Klondike's party got to Copper Centre early the next morning, their arrival creating much excitement, which was materially increased when the news of his wonderful strike at Cedar Gulch was circulated.

The Unknown was anxious to go back to discover whether Perkins was really dead. This Ned refused to do. He was satisfied with the result of his six days' fighting on Copper river, and had important business which required his attention, for it was necessary to send the gold he had found at Cedar Gulch to the bank at Juneau.

Soon they started over the Valdes glacier and in due time reached Juneau in safety.

The perils of the Indian raid were forgotten, and Young Klondike and his friends were ready for business again.

In the next number of this series we shall describe the certain experiences which Ned Golden and his companions passed through in a different part of the country. They are full of interest and wild adventure; there is not one dull page in the book, which is entitled, "YOUNG KLONDIKE AND THE YUKON BOOMERS; OR, MINING IN THE YELLOW HILLS."

[THE END.]

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